



Instruction-oriented leadership and teacher performance in Raudhatul Athfal institutions

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ABSTRACT

The improvement of educational quality in Raudhatul Athfal (RA) institutions depends heavily on leadership effectiveness and educators' competence in managing meaningful learning processes. This study examines the influence of learning-oriented leadership on teacher performance within RA institutions across Kulon Progo Regency. Employing a quantitative approach with an ex-post facto causal-correlational design, data were collected from 120 teachers using a saturated sampling (census) technique. The research instruments consisted of validated five-point Likert-scale questionnaires, and the data were analyzed using simple linear regression. Descriptive statistics indicate that both learning-oriented leadership and teacher performance range from moderate to high, although there are significant disparities across institutions. Dimensional analysis reveals that while direct learning facilitation is strong, external collaboration (boundary spanning) and child development assessment remain underdeveloped. Inferential statistics confirm a significant positive influence. These findings suggest that leadership prioritizing internal learning creates a supportive professional environment. This study recommends networking training for principals and assessment workshops for teachers to reduce educational quality disparities in the region.

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ABSTRAK

Peningkatan kualitas pendidikan pada jenjang Raudhatul Athfal (RA) sangat bergantung pada efektivitas kepemimpinan dan kompetensi tenaga pendidiknya dalam mengelola pembelajaran yang bermakna. Penelitian ini menguji pengaruh kepemimpinan berorientasi pembelajaran terhadap kinerja guru di lembaga RA se-Kabupaten Kulon Progo. Menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain korelasional-kausal ex-post facto, data dikumpulkan dari 120 guru melalui teknik sampling jenuh (*sensus*). Instrumen penelitian berupa kuesioner skala Likert lima poin yang telah divalidasi, dengan analisis data menggunakan regresi linear sederhana. Hasil statistik deskriptif menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan berorientasi pembelajaran dan kinerja guru berada pada rentang moderat hingga tinggi, meskipun terdapat disparitas signifikan antar lembaga. Analisis dimensi mengungkapkan bahwa fasilitasi pembelajaran langsung telah berjalan kuat, namun kolaborasi eksternal (*boundary spanning*) dan asesmen perkembangan anak masih belum berkembang optimal. Statistik inferensial mengonfirmasi adanya pengaruh positif yang signifikan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan yang memprioritaskan pembelajaran internal menciptakan lingkungan profesional yang suportif. Studi ini merekomendasikan pelatihan jejaring bagi kepala sekolah dan lokakarya asesmen bagi guru untuk mengurangi kesenjangan kualitas pendidikan di wilayah tersebut.

Kata Kunci: kepemimpinan pembelajaran; kinerja guru; pendidikan anak usia dini; raudhatul athfal

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INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (ECE), including Raudhatul Athfal (RA), serves as a crucial foundation of the national education system, shaping the quality of future human resources. During the first five years of life, a child's brain undergoes rapid development; therefore, appropriate educational interventions play a crucial role in determining the quality of human resources in the future (Kasmiati, 2025). In Indonesia, RA plays a unique role by combining national education standards with a strong Islamic religious curriculum. Consequently, the effectiveness of the learning process in RA is highly dependent on the synergy among educators and on their competence in delivering a curriculum that is both child-friendly and religious (Maryani et al., 2025).

The quality of educational outcomes at the RA level is directly correlated with teacher performance, which serves as the primary driver of instruction. Teacher performance encompasses not only technical teaching skills but also meticulous planning, interactive implementation, and comprehensive evaluation of child development (Ainscow, 2020). The role of teachers is no longer limited to delivering instructional content; it also encompasses serving as facilitators, motivators, innovators, and agents of change, guiding learners in developing global competencies (Andayani et al., 2025). However, in practice, significant performance variations persist, and the assessment and documentation of child development are often weak, hindering educational effectiveness.

Phenomena in Kulon Progo Regency indicate significant challenges in addressing disparities in educational quality across RA institutions. Initial observations suggest that not all teachers exhibit a uniform level of performance, as reflected in their management of play activities and their conduct of authentic assessments of students (Tarso et al., 2025). These performance differences often stem from the work environment and the professional support they receive at school. In this context, the role of the RA principal is central, serving as the primary driver who must coordinate all organizational resources to support teachers' instructional tasks in the classroom (Mala et al., 2025).

Learning-oriented leadership has emerged as a relevant paradigm to address these challenges. Unlike traditional administrative leadership, this model emphasizes the leader's role as a learning facilitator for teachers, a provider of space for innovation, and a bridge to external resources. Leaders who are learning-oriented focus on developing teacher capacity through supervision that is developmental rather than merely evaluative. Leadership that focuses on instruction is capable of creating a positive academic climate, which ultimately motivates teachers to improve the quality of their teaching (Saine et al., 2023).

Although learning-oriented leadership is theoretically considered highly effective, its implementation in RA in Kulon Progo Regency still faces obstacles in the "boundary spanning" dimension, specifically in building external networks. The school principal is considered a key figure in strengthening external networks as part of a strategy to improve educational quality (Oktaviani et al., 2025). RA principals tend to be more active in internal facilitation but less effective at leveraging external resources or building inter-institutional collaborations. This lack of networking may limit teachers' access to the latest pedagogical developments and

best practices from other institutions, thereby constraining teachers' performance (Amemasor et al., 2025).

Given this urgency, empirical testing is required to determine the extent to which learning-oriented leadership significantly influences teacher performance in the RA environment. This research is vital to provide a scientific basis for policymakers, particularly the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office in Kulon Progo Regency, in formulating leadership and teacher professionalism development programs. By understanding the causal relationship between these two variables, appropriate strategies can be identified to minimize disparities in educational quality and enhance the performance standards of RA teachers in the region (Frisila & Niron, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is understood as a set of strategic leadership behaviors that focus intensively on improving the quality of teaching and learning processes by directly influencing teachers in curriculum development, instructional planning, and the creation of a supportive learning environment. The primary focus of this leadership model is not merely on administrative routines but on ensuring that the school's vision, mission, and academic goals are effectively translated into meaningful classroom practices through systematic supervision, continuous monitoring, and consistent instructional support based on Hallinger's book titled *"Leading Educational Change: Global Perspectives on Educational Leadership and Policy"*. By prioritizing learning outcomes, instructional leadership positions teaching quality as the core indicator of school effectiveness (Oti & Doe, 2025).

Principals who practice instructional leadership serve as professional mentors and learning leaders, providing adequate educational resources, facilitating professional development, and offering constructive feedback to teachers to enhance their pedagogical competencies. The active involvement of school leaders in discussing instructional issues, classroom challenges, and student learning progress is believed to foster a collaborative and reflective school culture oriented toward high academic achievement (Heenan et al., 2023). Such leadership practices also encourage innovation, shared responsibility, and continuous improvement in teaching and learning processes. Effective educational leaders do not merely focus on managing educational institutions but also emphasize instructional development, team empowerment, and the enhancement of teaching and learning quality (Lahitania & Muttaqin, 2025).

Teacher Performance

Teacher performance reflects the qualitative and quantitative outcomes achieved by educators through effective lesson planning, interactive instructional delivery, and comprehensive evaluation of student learning. A teacher's success in managing learning interactions, maintaining student engagement, and achieving curriculum objectives depends largely on deep subject-matter mastery, pedagogical competence, and the ability to adapt teaching strategies to diverse learning needs and classroom contexts (Fairman et al., 2023;

Kilag et al., 2023). High levels of teacher performance are therefore essential for ensuring effective learning experiences and improving overall educational quality (Adekanbi & Oladele, 2024; Mazana et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, teacher performance is formally assessed based on four core competency standards: pedagogical, personal, social, and professional, which must be integrated holistically into daily teaching practice. Optimal teacher performance is influenced not only by individual teaching ability or experience, but also by transparent managerial support, instructional leadership, and a collaborative working climate that encourages professional dialogue and continuous development (Kilag et al., 2023). Supportive school environments enable teachers to improve their instructional practices, strengthen professionalism, and sustain motivation in carrying out their educational responsibilities (Mogas et al., 2022).

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a crucial developmental period from birth to age 6, aimed at stimulating physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development to prepare children for future learning. During this sensitive “golden age,” educational approaches should be developmentally appropriate, non-coercive, and centered on children’s needs (Astiwi et al., 2024). Play-based learning is therefore emphasized as the most effective approach, allowing children to develop cognitive abilities, motor skills, language competence, and socio-emotional capacities in a natural and meaningful manner (Murray, 2023).

The quality of education at this level is largely determined by the institution’s ability to create a safe, child-friendly, and stimulating learning environment that encourages active exploration and curiosity. Warm, responsive, and nurturing interactions between teachers and children are fundamental in building positive character traits, emotional security, self-confidence, and intrinsic motivation to learn (Fleer, 2019). These early experiences form a strong foundation for lifelong learning and play a critical role in preparing children for the transition to more structured and formal stages of education (Sitorus et al., 2025).

Raudhatul Athfal (RA)

Raudhatul Athfal (RA) is a formal early childhood education institution under the Ministry of Religious Affairs that comprehensively integrates Islamic values into its curriculum and educational practices. The primary objective of RA extends beyond the transmission of academic knowledge to the holistic formation of children’s character, morality, and spirituality from an early age (Zannatunnisya et al., 2025). Through the introduction of basic concepts of faith, prophetic role models, and religious practices, RA seeks to cultivate noble character and religious awareness using meaningful, play-based, and developmentally appropriate learning activities (Pambayun et al., 2023).

The implementation of learning in RA requires teachers to demonstrate high levels of creativity, patience, and pedagogical sensitivity in translating abstract religious concepts into concrete, enjoyable, and easily understood learning experiences for young children. The effectiveness of RA institutions in achieving their educational goals depends heavily on strong synergy between visionary and religiously grounded leadership and high teacher

performance. Such synergy enables the alignment of national education standards with the strengthening of Islamic values as the institution's distinctive identity, ensuring both academic quality and moral development are achieved simultaneously (Azimah et al., 2025).

METHODS

This research adopts a quantitative approach with an ex post facto causal-correlational design to investigate the influence of learning-oriented leadership (X) on teacher performance (Y) among RA teachers in Kulon Progo Regency. The design was selected because the leadership variables occurred naturally and could not be experimentally manipulated, thereby allowing the examination of causal relationships using non-experimental empirical data. Using a saturated sampling (census) technique, the study targeted the entire population of 130 RA teachers, yielding 120 usable responses. Data were collected using closed-ended questionnaires on a five-point Likert scale, comprising 32 items for leadership and 34 for teacher performance, and prior to main analysis, pilot testing with 30 respondents confirmed that all items were valid, with item-total correlations exceeding the 0.361 threshold, and highly reliable, with Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.972 and 0.971 well above the recommended 0.70. The research model depicts a direct, unidirectional relationship between the independent and dependent variables, as illustrated in **Figure 1**.

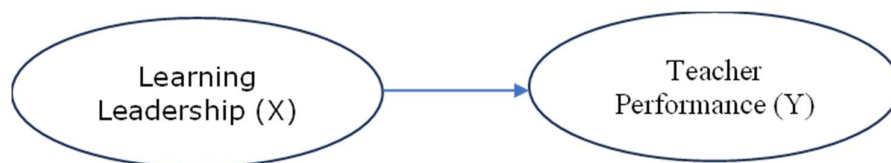


Figure 1. Research Model
Source: Research data (2025)

Based on the figure above, this research model depicts a direct, unidirectional relationship between the independent and dependent variables, in which learning-oriented leadership (X) is hypothesized to influence teacher performance (Y), as illustrated in Figure 1. The arrow connecting the two variables indicates that the effectiveness of a leadership style oriented toward the learning process is a determinant of teachers' productivity and professional quality within the RA environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The descriptive statistics presented in **Table 1** indicate that the level of learning-oriented leadership among RA teachers in Kulon Progo Regency ranges from moderate to high. Based on data collected from 120 respondents, the learning-oriented leadership variable had a mean score of 95.81 (SD = 31.98), a minimum score of 33, and a maximum score of 159. This score range closely approaches the theoretical limits of the instrument (32-160), indicating substantial variation in teachers' perceptions of principals' learning-oriented leadership practices.

When the total score is averaged across the 32 questionnaire items, the mean item score is approximately 2.99 on a five-point Likert scale, suggesting that teachers generally perceive the implementation of learning-oriented leadership by RA principals as moderately positive. The distribution of learning-oriented leadership scores is relatively symmetric, with skewness = 0.001 and kurtosis = -0.725, indicating no extreme deviation from normality. Overall, these findings provide preliminary evidence that RA principals in Kulon Progo Regency have adopted learning-oriented leadership practices. However, the intensity and quality of implementation vary considerably across institutions.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Learning-Oriented Leadership

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Learning-Oriented Leadership	120	95,81	31,98	33	159

Source: Research data (2025)

The wide variation in learning-oriented leadership scores is further reflected in the relatively large standard deviation (31.98) in **Table 1**, indicating marked differences among RA institutions in the enactment of learning-oriented leadership practices. Dimension-level analysis reveals that Direct Learning Facilitation achieved the highest mean score, suggesting that RA principals are relatively more active in directly facilitating teacher learning, for example, through modelling practices, knowledge sharing, and the provision of learning resources. In contrast, the Boundary Spanning dimension recorded the lowest mean score, indicating that efforts to extend learning networks beyond the organisation, such as collaboration with external stakeholders or the utilisation of external resources, remain underdeveloped.

This pattern suggests that learning-oriented leadership practices in RA settings tend to be more strongly focused on internal organisational activities rather than on cross-institutional learning. The findings indicate that although learning-oriented leadership practices are present, their implementation is uneven across dimensions, resulting in substantial variation in teachers' perceptions.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Learning-Oriented Leadership Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Direct Learning Facilitation	33,03	10,09	10	49
Creating Space for Learning	23,98	8,52	8	40
Supporting Self-Directed Learning	23,90	8,41	8	40
Boundary Spanning	17,90	6,23	6	30

Source: Research data (2025)

The descriptive and explanatory findings presented in **Table 2** correspond with the substantive research issue of unequal leadership quality across RA institutions in Kulon Progo Regency. Variations in teachers' perceptions of learning-oriented leadership indicate that not all RA principals possess comparable capacities or strategies for facilitating teacher learning. This condition reflects the diverse organisational characteristics of RA institutions, including differences in resources, principals' professional backgrounds, and institutional support

structures. Uneven implementation of learning-oriented leadership may result in disparities in the quality of support provided to teachers, ultimately influencing variations in teacher performance. Accordingly, the descriptive analysis not only presents statistical conditions but also highlights substantive issues that underpin the examination of the relationship between learning-oriented leadership and teacher performance.

The descriptive statistics presented in **Table 3** indicate that teacher performance among RA teachers in Kulon Progo Regency also ranges from moderate to high. Based on data from 120 respondents, teacher performance recorded a mean score of 102.08, a standard deviation of 36.25, a minimum score of 35, and a maximum score of 168. This score range closely approximates the instrument's theoretical limits (34-170), indicating that the data capture nearly the full spectrum of possible performance levels.

When averaged across the 34 questionnaire items, the mean item score is approximately 3.00 on a five-point scale, suggesting that teachers generally perceive their performance as moderately good. The distribution of teacher performance scores is relatively symmetric, with a skewness of 0.002 and a kurtosis of -1.107 , indicating no extreme clustering of scores. Overall, these findings suggest that most RA teachers perceive their performance positively, although considerable variation exists among individuals.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Teacher Performance Dimensions

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Teacher Performance	120	102,08	36,25	35	168

Source: Research data (2025)

The relatively large standard deviation (36.25) in **Table 3** indicates substantial variation in teacher performance. Dimension-level analysis reveals that the Implementation dimension achieved the highest mean score, reflecting teachers' relative strengths in classroom instruction, child activity management, and the application of instructional strategies. Conversely, the Assessment dimension recorded the lowest mean score, indicating that assessing children's development and utilising assessment results for instructional improvement remain challenging for some teachers. This pattern suggests that teacher performance is stronger in direct instructional practice than in evaluative tasks, which require more complex analytical and documentation skills. These findings underscore that teacher performance is not a homogeneous construct but comprises multiple dimensions with varying levels of attainment among RA teachers.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of Teacher Performance Dimensions

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Planning	24,05	9,16	8	40
Implementation	30,00	10,39	11	49
Assessment	23,99	8,66	8	40
Professional Development	24,04	9,14	8	40

Source: Research data (2025)

The descriptive and explanatory findings presented in **Table 4** are closely linked to the realities of early childhood education in Kulon Progo Regency. Variations in teacher performance reflect differences in professional capacity, work experience, and the level of environmental support available to teachers. Although most teachers rate their performance as high, a proportion still rate it as moderate or low, indicating performance disparities. These disparities are consistent with challenges faced by RA institutions, including limited resources, diverse educational backgrounds among teachers, and varying intensities of professional development support. Consequently, observed variations in teacher performance cannot be separated from the leadership and organisational context in which teachers operate.

The results of the simple linear regression analysis presented in **Table 5** demonstrate a significant relationship between learning-oriented leadership and teacher performance. The regression analysis indicates that learning-oriented leadership has an unstandardised coefficient of 0.557, a t-value of 7.127, and a significance level of 0.000, which is well below the 0.05 threshold. This confirms that learning-oriented leadership exerts a statistically significant influence on teacher performance. The positive regression coefficient indicates that higher levels of learning-oriented leadership are associated with higher levels of teacher performance. The standardised beta coefficient of 0.492 suggests a strong effect of learning-oriented leadership within the tested model.

Table 5. Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Independent Variable	B	Standard Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	-15,311	12,261	-	-1,249	0,214
Learning-Oriented Leadership (X)	0,557	0,078	0,492	7,127	0,000

Source: Research data (2025)

Based on **Table 6**, the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.460 indicates that learning-oriented leadership accounts for a substantial proportion of the variance in teacher performance. Although other factors may also influence teacher performance, learning-oriented leadership meaningfully explains performance differences among RA teachers. The relatively small difference between R^2 and Adjusted R^2 (0.460 and 0.446) indicates that the regression model is stable and does not suffer from overfitting. These findings suggest that the relationship between learning-oriented leadership and teacher performance is consistent and robust, consistent with the empirical patterns observed in the data.

Overall, the inferential analysis provides empirical evidence addressing the research problem concerning factors influencing RA teacher performance in Kulon Progo Regency. The variation in teacher performance identified in the study is demonstrably associated with differences in principals' learning-oriented leadership practices. These findings indicate that leadership approaches that prioritise learning are more likely to create supportive conditions for teachers to perform their professional duties effectively. Consequently, the results confirm that learning-oriented leadership is a key factor in understanding and explaining variations in teacher performance within RA settings, providing a strong empirical foundation for further discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of this relationship.

Discussion

Research findings indicate that learning-oriented leadership among RA principals in Kulon Progo Regency falls within the moderate-to-high category, with an average score of 95.81. This suggests that most RA principals recognize the importance of their role as learning facilitators for teachers. Through innovative leadership, principals can design professional learning programs that strengthen teachers' competencies and foster a positive learning culture (Kavak, Ş., & Akyürek, 2023; Mandasari et al., 2025). The dominance of the Direct Learning Facilitation dimension indicates a tendency for leaders to engage in technical activities, such as mentoring and providing learning resources. This finding aligns with the theory that active leader involvement in instructional development is a key factor in building educators' self-efficacy in early childhood, as articulated by Hallinger.

However, the low score on the Boundary Spanning dimension indicates a gap in leadership practices at RA, as collaboration with external networks remains limited. Importantly, principals' leadership strategies for building collaboration with parents and the community contribute positively to the development of strong partnerships (Dariyanto & Wulandari, 2020). Leadership that focuses too heavily on internal aspects without building strategic partnerships with external stakeholders can hinder institutional innovation. This reinforces the argument that educational leaders in the modern era should not only manage internal resources but also act as a linkage that brings in new resources and knowledge from outside the organization to enrich the school's learning ecosystem (Kilag et al., 2023).

Regarding teacher performance, the research findings indicate positive outcomes, particularly in classroom instruction implementation. RA teachers in Kulon Progo demonstrate strong competence in direct interaction with students and managing play activities. This phenomenon supports previous research findings that early childhood education teachers tend to have strong practical pedagogical mastery due to the daily demands of creating a positive learning environment (Goldschmidt & Pedro, 2019). Nevertheless, the low performance in the assessment dimension indicates challenges in analytical skills and in documenting child development, which require further attention.

The results of the simple linear regression analysis provide strong empirical evidence that learning-oriented leadership has a positive and significant influence on teacher performance, with a contribution value (R^2) of 46%. This figure indicates that nearly half of the variation in teacher performance is attributable to the principal's facilitation of teachers' learning. This finding confirms that instructional quality in schools depends heavily on how leaders create an organizational climate that supports teachers' continuous professional growth (Fairman et al., 2023; Mailool et al., 2020).

Overall, this study proves that leadership focused on learning is a crucial predictor of teacher success within the RA environment. The performance variations found in the field are closely related to differences in leadership capacity across institutions. Therefore, strengthening the capacity of RA principals in the Boundary Spanning dimension and enhancing teachers' assessment abilities are two urgent agendas. The synergy between visionary leaders and competent teachers will create a solid foundation for the quality of early childhood Islamic education (Azimah et al., 2025; Pambayun et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

Learning-oriented leadership has been shown to have a positive and significant influence on the performance of RA teachers in Kulon Progo Regency, contributing 46%, with direct learning facilitation practices by principals serving as the primary driver of classroom teaching effectiveness. Although leadership levels and teacher performance generally fall within the moderate to high categories, a wide gap between institutions remains, along with specific weaknesses in the boundary-spanning dimension among principals and in child development assessment skills among teachers. Therefore, it is recommended that the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office of Kulon Progo Regency organize targeted training programs to enhance the capacity of RA principals to build external partnership networks, and provide intensive workshops for teachers on documentation techniques, child development assessment, and analysis to minimize educational quality disparities across the region.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The author also affirms that all data, analyses, and content of the article have been prepared honestly and academically and are free from plagiarism. This article is the result of independent research conducted and developed by the author.

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