



Innovative Leadership Practices of Early Childhood Education Principals in Enhancing Teacher Productivity

Bahera^{1a*}, Ahmad Syukri^{2b}, Mahmud My^{3c}, Arief Al Hazmi Adlan^{4d}

^{1a,2b,3c} UIN Sultan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, Indonesia, ^{4d}Kazan Federal University, Russian Federation

^{1a,2b,3c}herabahera@gmail.com

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*Correspondence Address:

herabahera@gmail.com

Abstract:

This study aims to explore the role of leadership in improving teacher productivity at TK Islam Al-Azhar Jambi. Early Childhood Education (PAUD) plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for children's development, and effective leadership from PAUD principals is essential to ensure high-quality education. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the principal's leadership significantly influences teacher productivity through several key managerial factors, including managerial competence, professional development strategies, leadership style, motivation, communication, and a positive work environment. The ability of the PAUD principal to implement transformational leadership, build effective communication, and foster a supportive atmosphere directly contributes to teachers' motivation, confidence, and overall performance. This study highlights the importance of strengthening leadership capacity in PAUD institutions to enhance the quality of early childhood education.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) plays a fundamental role in establishing the foundation for optimal child development. During early childhood, children develop a variety of basic skills, both cognitive and social, which are crucial for their future. Therefore, the existence of high-quality PAUD institutions is essential to ensure that children can begin their educational journey properly. According to Asbari et al., (2019), PAUD does not only focus on formal education but also develops children's ability to interact socially, refine motor skills, and foster positive character traits that impact their lives in the long run. Despite its strategic role, challenges in access and quality of PAUD education remain significant issues in Indonesia, including in Jambi Province.

According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) of Jambi Province, in 2023, only around 70% of children aged 3–6 years in the province were enrolled in PAUD institutions. This figure is far below the national target, which aims for 100% enrollment in PAUD programs

by 2024. The disparity is particularly evident between urban and rural areas. For example, in Jambi City, the PAUD participation rate reached 85%, while in rural areas such as Merangin and Tebo Regencies, the rate was only about 55%. Several factors contribute to the low participation rate, including limited facilities, low parental awareness of the importance of early childhood education, and a lack of trained teaching staff in certain areas. This suggests that young children need to receive optimal services through improved educational management and a conducive learning environment (Puspitaningtyas et al., 2019).

Management improvement is also necessary because PAUD plays a very important role in developing and preparing learners holistically and integratively. To optimize the quality of education, PAUD requires effective management, especially in planning and organizing. PAUD is one of the most strategic levels of formal education and greatly determines a child's overall journey and future (Azainil et al., 2021). It serves as the foundation for children's readiness to enter the next level of education. Therefore, PAUD must receive proper attention from various parties, including families, the government, and society. Early childhood is the most appropriate time to develop a child's potential and intelligence, and such development will significantly impact their future life. Conversely, improper brain and potential development at this stage can have serious consequences for the child's later development (Hudori et al., 2024).

The role of the PAUD head (school principal) is crucial. The PAUD head is not only responsible for managing the institution but also acts as a leader who can motivate, guide, and support teachers in performing their duties. An effective PAUD head leads not merely through authority but must also possess strong managerial skills, such as planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating educational programs. As a leader, the PAUD head must also create a supportive work environment for teachers and other educators, enabling them to perform optimally in improving the quality of education (Hutagalung & Suratman, 2019).

Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System mandates that educational management must be conducted professionally and responsibly. Therefore, the effectiveness of the PAUD head's management has a direct impact on the quality of education provided by teachers and can increase teacher productivity in carrying out their duties. A good education manager can create an environment that supports the development of teacher competencies, including through training, career development, and the provision of necessary administrative support. Previous research has shown that PAUD heads with effective leadership abilities can improve teacher performance, which in turn positively affects the quality of education in PAUD institutions (Abubakar & Sahriana, 2022).

The importance of the PAUD head's role aligns with the provisions of Law No. 20 of 2003, which emphasizes that educational management must be carried out professionally and responsibly. Thus, PAUD heads are expected to possess good managerial skills to run the institution effectively and leadership capabilities that empower teachers to enhance their productivity and teaching quality.

Several PAUD heads in Jambi Province have participated in various managerial training programs and implemented these skills in managing PAUD institutions, yet still face challenges, especially in areas with limited resources. Effective PAUD heads can utilize their managerial skills to create educational programs tailored to children's needs and maintain teacher motivation and performance (Murtisari et al., 2025). For instance, in Batanghari Regency, PAUD heads with skills in financial and resource management are more effective in providing adequate educational facilities and supporting teachers to attend relevant training. Hence, the effectiveness of PAUD head management in supporting teacher productivity is a key determinant of the quality of PAUD education (Bayu et al., 2024).

Regarding education and leadership, Islam also provides highly relevant guidance, particularly in Quranic verses that emphasize the importance of knowledge, just leadership, and good governance in educating children. One verse relevant to this theme is Surah At-Tahrim

(66:6):

"O you who have believed, protect yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is people and stones..." This verse serves as a warning to every individual, especially parents and leaders, to safeguard their families and children from the hellfire, which can be interpreted as a responsibility to educate and provide proper guidance to future generations. As leaders of educational institutions, PAUD heads play a vital role in guiding and nurturing children, especially during this critical stage of life. Good and effective leadership in PAUD institutions ensures that children receive education aligned with Islamic teachings and can grow into individuals who contribute positively to religion, nation, and state (W. N. Hidayat, Nursikin, et al., 2023).

Several previous studies have examined the role of PAUD heads in improving education quality and teacher performance. For example, research conducted by Suyanto and Haryanto showed that PAUD heads with strong leadership abilities can enhance teacher productivity through internal policies that support teacher training and professional development (Kurniawan et al., 2018). Additionally, research by Alimuddin revealed that leadership based on effective communication between PAUD heads and teachers can improve teaching quality, especially in resource-limited areas.

However, despite the abundance of studies on leadership and management of PAUD heads, there remains a gap in research regarding specific factors that influence the effectiveness of PAUD head management in areas with low PAUD participation rates, such as in Jambi Province. Previous studies have tended to focus on urban areas or PAUD institutions with more abundant resources, while studies in rural areas facing greater challenges are still very limited. This research aims to fill that gap by focusing on Jambi Province, to better understand how PAUD head management can improve teacher productivity and address the challenges in low-participation areas.



Method (منهج)

This research is a field study with a qualitative descriptive approach. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to understand and explore in-depth information regarding phenomena observed in the field, particularly related to the role of PAUD (Early Childhood Education) management in improving teacher productivity in Jambi Province. The researcher selected TK Islam Al-Azhar Jambi as the research location. The subjects in this study are the PAUD teachers at the kindergarten. The researcher seeks to explore the perspectives of PAUD principals, teachers, and other relevant parties to obtain comprehensive information about the factors that influence the success of PAUD management and its impact on improving the quality of early childhood education.

Data collection was carried out using three techniques: observation of the school environment and conditions to gain a general overview of the activities at TK Islam Al-Azhar, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis in qualitative research can be conducted both during and after the data collection process through several stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The collected information was analyzed using the interactive analysis model by Miles and Huberman.



Result (نتائج)

The Leadership Role of the PAUD Principal in Improving Teacher Productivity at TK Islam Al-Azhar Jambi

The leadership of the PAUD (Early Childhood Education) principal plays a central role in creating a quality educational environment that supports optimal development for young children (Nurmiyanti & Candra, 2019). A conducive, safe, and enjoyable environment is a vital foundation for children's growth, and this cannot be separated from the influence of effective leadership. One of the keys to achieving this goal is enhancing the productivity of PAUD teachers.

Teachers, as the front liners in the learning process, play a crucial role in providing appropriate stimulation according to the stages of child development. To carry out this task effectively, teachers need strong support, ongoing motivation, and clear direction from their leaders. In this regard, the PAUD principal bears a major responsibility in fostering a positive work environment, facilitating teacher professional development, and ensuring that all learning activities are implemented effectively and efficiently. Through visionary and supportive leadership, the principal can drive teacher performance to a more optimal level, which directly contributes to improving the quality of early childhood education services (Rupnidah & Eliza, 2022).

As stated by Indah Suarti, S.Pd., the Principal of PAUD Al Azhar Diniyyah Jambi, the role of a PAUD principal extends far beyond simply being the head or administrator of an institution. A PAUD leader must be capable of creating a positive, supportive, and enthusiastic atmosphere, and must play a key role in motivating teachers to work better and more productively. Effective leadership is not only about managing administrative or technical aspects but also paying great attention to the development and well-being of teachers. A principal with a comprehensive understanding will realize that teacher productivity is not solely determined by workload, but also deeply influenced by the emotional, psychological, and social conditions of the teachers. A supportive work environment, open communication, and recognition of teacher achievements are crucial factors in building a strong work ethic (W. N. Hidayat, Nurlaila, et al., 2023). Teachers also emphasize the importance of sustained support from the institution's leader. When teachers feel that they are not working alone but are part of a collaborative and supportive system, the burden they feel will be lighter. This directly impacts their motivation, work enthusiasm, and ultimately their productivity in providing quality education services for young children (Muljono & Kusumawati, 2023).

The leadership of the PAUD principal is crucial in increasing teacher productivity (Tanjung et al., 2023). An effective PAUD principal not only carries out administrative functions but also serves as a leader who guides, motivates, and creates a supportive working environment. Several key strategies a PAUD principal can implement to support teacher productivity include:

1. Providing Support and Motivation

The principal acts not only as an educational institution manager but also as a figure who inspires and encourages teachers to grow and improve. By using positive words and giving sincere recognition for teachers' efforts and achievements, the principal can create a work atmosphere that is conducive and full of enthusiasm. This environment not only supports increased productivity but also strengthens teachers' sense of responsibility in providing the best education for the nation's future generations. Inspirational leadership becomes a key component in realizing a quality and sustainable educational vision.

A PAUD principal who fosters emotional well-being builds a workplace filled with appreciation and empathy. Teachers who feel emotionally supported are better equipped to handle stress and daily challenges. This reduces fatigue and creates a sense of security, allowing them to focus and stay passionate about their work.

Such a morally uplifting atmosphere positively impacts the quality of learning. Appreciated teachers are more motivated to give their best in every learning session, creating a fun and effective experience for children. Emotionally well teachers can pass on positive energy to students, creating a loving and supportive learning environment that aids both academic and socio-emotional development.

2. Enhancing Teachers' Skills and Competencies

Effective leadership is not only measured by administrative performance or workplace atmosphere but also by the principal's commitment to professional development. A dedicated principal continually seeks ways to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills, including through workshops and training that broaden their understanding of early childhood education strategies

and methods. Ongoing learning opportunities help teachers improve their instructional quality, which positively affects children's learning and development. This type of leadership empowers teachers and makes the institution a dynamic and innovative place for delivering quality education (Syahripin et al., 2021).

Principals who actively support teacher development can significantly improve the quality of teaching. Continuous support helps teachers become more confident and productive in their daily responsibilities. Competent teachers manage classrooms better and deliver more engaging and meaningful learning experiences. This is crucial in supporting the holistic development of young children—cognitive, social, emotional, and motor skills alike. A proactive and caring principal provides a solid foundation for a high-quality early childhood education system.

3. Creating a Positive Work Environment

Principals who cultivate a positive, respectful, and collaborative atmosphere greatly influence teacher motivation and productivity. When teachers feel appreciated, included in decision-making, and valued for their contributions, they become more engaged and committed. A supportive work culture boosts creativity and innovation in teaching methods, ultimately enhancing the learning experience for students.

A harmonious work environment affects how teachers interact with each other and their students. Mutual respect and trust among colleagues encourage idea-sharing and collaboration, which strengthens team cohesion and improves instructional quality. This teamwork allows teachers to design more effective learning strategies tailored to children's needs.

Additionally, a positive environment helps teachers stay focused and dedicated. When they feel supported by leadership and peers, they are better equipped to face challenges, find creative solutions, and continuously improve their teaching. Emotional well-being translates into better performance and enthusiasm, essential for a successful early childhood education program.

4. Effective Time and Resource Management

A principal must be skilled in time and resource management to ensure smooth daily operations. Efficient scheduling and coordination prevent unnecessary burdens on teachers and allow for better preparation. Managing facilities, materials, and human resources also ensures that all operational needs are met. Effective planning creates a productive and supportive environment where teachers can focus on delivering quality education.

Resource management includes maintaining classrooms, teaching aids, and learning materials. When resources are adequate and accessible, teachers can work without disruption and dedicate more energy to instruction. This enables them to create enjoyable and effective learning experiences for children, supporting their growth and development.

5. Building Strong Communication

Good communication is a vital skill for any PAUD principal. They must communicate effectively with teachers, staff, parents, and external stakeholders. Open and clear communication ensures that all activities run smoothly and helps foster trust and collaboration. By maintaining strong relationships with parents and the community, the principal helps create a supportive educational environment for young learners.

An effective principal provides clear directions while also giving teachers the freedom to explore innovative teaching approaches. This trust encourages creativity and continuous improvement. Principals also motivate teachers to pursue lifelong learning, stay updated with educational trends, and adapt to students' evolving needs. With proper guidance and encouragement, teachers become more confident and capable of creating enjoyable, meaningful classroom experiences (Khosiah & Maryani, 2020).

Strong and effective leadership from PAUD principals not only improves teacher productivity but also shapes children who are better prepared to face future challenges. Children who receive quality early education grow into confident, creative individuals with a strong foundation in knowledge and character. Such leadership reflects a visionary approach that values

both institutional progress and the long-term development of society. Through strategic leadership, early childhood education becomes the first solid step in shaping an excellent generation ready to contribute positively to the nation (Eliyana et al., 2022).

Managerial Factors in Improving Teacher Productivity

There are various interrelated managerial factors that influence the effectiveness of PAUD (Early Childhood Education) principals in improving teacher productivity. PAUD heads in Jambi Province stated that one of the main factors affecting managerial effectiveness is the ability to lead and manage human resources. PAUD principals highlighted the importance of strong communication skills to build harmonious relationships with teachers. Principals who successfully establish two-way communication with teachers are able to identify problems more quickly and provide appropriate solutions. In addition, they must also be capable of providing clear direction and motivating teachers to continually improve the quality of their teaching (Asikin, 2016).

Another factor found during interviews is the strategy for promoting teacher professionalism. PAUD principals emphasized that training and competence development are key to boosting productivity and teaching quality within PAUD institutions. Through well-planned and continuous training, teachers not only gain new knowledge but also update their teaching methods and approaches in line with current developments in early childhood education. One principal stated, *"Regular training and ongoing mentoring are essential to equip teachers so they are always ready to face new challenges and deliver innovative teaching tailored to children's needs."* Thus, focusing on professional development is a crucial strategy for building a dynamic and high-quality educational environment.

The managerial factors that affect the effectiveness of PAUD heads in increasing teacher productivity include several interconnected and mutually reinforcing aspects. As leaders, PAUD principals must be able to design and implement internal policies aimed specifically at improving teaching quality (Rostini et al., 2022). These policies include managing human resources by providing training and professional development aligned with teacher needs so that they can continue to enhance their skills. Furthermore, principals must create a supportive and comfortable work environment where teachers feel motivated and enthusiastic about performing their duties. Equally important is the efficient and transparent planning and management of budgets so that teaching facilities and resources can be fulfilled and continuously improved. All of these elements work together to optimize teacher productivity and improve the quality of PAUD education (Asbari et al., 2019).

The following are several key managerial factors identified through research and relevant literature:

1. Managerial Competence

The managerial competence of PAUD principals plays a vital role in influencing teacher performance. Principals with strong managerial abilities can manage various aspects of education, from planning, organizing, and implementation, to control. With such skills, they can create a supportive work environment, provide clear direction, and ensure the optimal use of human, time, and facility resources. Structured and communicative leadership fosters a positive and collaborative work culture. When principals effectively manage their responsibilities, teachers feel valued, motivated, and have clear direction in their work. This ultimately enhances teaching performance, creates an enjoyable learning atmosphere for children, and supports comprehensive educational goals.

2. Training and Development

Leadership training has been shown to significantly enhance the managerial

effectiveness of PAUD principals. Through such training, principals gain new knowledge and experiences that strengthen their capacity to lead professionally. Skills such as inspiring and motivating teams, making strategic and data-driven decisions, and managing conflicts wisely are sharpened. Training also helps principals understand team dynamics, improve interpersonal communication, and strengthen their integrity and accountability. With enhanced leadership capacity, PAUD heads are more capable of creating a harmonious, productive, and quality-oriented work environment. Therefore, investing in leadership training is a strategic move to support overall PAUD management success.

3. Leadership Style

Participatory and supportive leadership has a significant impact on creating a positive work climate, which in turn improves teacher performance. Principals who apply a participative leadership style not only give instructions but also involve teachers in decision-making processes that affect educational activities. This involvement makes teachers feel appreciated and actively engaged in school management. Moreover, the emotional and professional support provided by principals helps teachers feel more confident and motivated in their work. Supportive leadership fosters an environment where teachers feel safe to share ideas, face challenges, and grow. As a result, a positive work atmosphere emerges, boosting teacher morale and collaboration, which enhances teaching quality and teacher performance.

4. Motivation and Support

Teacher motivation is a critical factor contributing to the managerial effectiveness of PAUD principals. When teachers feel motivated—either by a supportive work environment or recognition for their achievements—they are more enthusiastic in carrying out their teaching duties. A principal who can create an inspiring atmosphere and offer positive reinforcement helps teachers feel valued and essential to the success of the educational process. High motivation also drives teachers to innovate and enhance their teaching quality. On the other hand, low motivation can hinder managerial effectiveness, as unmotivated teachers may not perform their tasks optimally. Therefore, it is important for PAUD principals to maintain teacher motivation through effective communication, recognition, and relevant professional development.

5. Work Environment

External factors, such as the number of students, significantly influence the managerial effectiveness of PAUD principals. An increase in student numbers poses its own challenges in terms of managing available resources, including teaching staff allocation, facility use, and time management. When the student-teacher ratio becomes imbalanced, the quality of interaction and individual attention each child receives may decline. This directly impacts the effectiveness of the learning process and children's developmental outcomes. PAUD principals must develop effective strategies to address these challenges, such as hiring additional staff, adjusting activity schedules more flexibly, or optimizing the use of available facilities. Hence, adaptive and responsive managerial skills are essential to maintain the quality of early childhood education services.

The managerial factors identified in this study show that a PAUD principal's effectiveness in improving teacher productivity depends not only on technical or administrative skills, but also on interpersonal and managerial competencies. This study reveals that transformational

leadership is one of the key elements in successfully motivating and improving teacher performance. Transformational leadership includes the principal's ability to provide inspiration, motivation, and a clear vision and mission to their teachers. This kind of leadership fosters a positive and enthusiastic work environment, encourages teachers to innovate, and enhances their dedication to their responsibilities (Owhor, 2025).

In addition to transformational leadership, effective communication is also a critical foundation for building strong relationships between PAUD principals and teachers. Based on interviews with several principals, many stated that open, honest, and transparent communication enables them to better understand teachers' needs, expectations, and challenges in daily classroom practice. Through effective communication, principals can offer timely and constructive feedback, making teachers feel appreciated and motivated to grow. Moreover, good communication fosters trust and mutual support, strengthening collaboration among members of the educational institution. Therefore, communication skills are crucial in supporting the managerial effectiveness of PAUD principals in enhancing teacher performance and the overall quality of education (Hudori et al., 2024).

Strong interpersonal skills—such as empathy, active listening, and the ability to build harmonious relationships—play a vital role in creating a conducive work environment and supporting teacher productivity (K. Hidayat et al., 2022). Principals who demonstrate empathy for teachers' needs and challenges are more likely to build trust and comfort in daily communication. Additionally, active listening enables principals to understand teachers' perspectives more deeply, thus offering appropriate and effective support. A close and harmonious relationship between principals and teachers not only boosts morale but also fosters a sense of shared ownership in achieving early childhood education goals. Therefore, strong interpersonal skills are a key asset for PAUD principals to lead effectively and foster a positive synergy that directly impacts improved learning quality.



Conclusion (خاتمة)

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of PAUD (Early Childhood Education) leadership in improving teacher productivity is strongly influenced by various managerial factors, such as managerial competence, leadership style, professional development, motivation, communication, and a supportive work environment. A PAUD principal who applies transformational leadership, fosters effective communication, and possesses strong interpersonal skills is more capable of creating a positive working atmosphere, motivating teachers, and continuously enhancing the quality of early childhood education.



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