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Assessing the Quality of Islamic Early Childhood Education: Evidence from Raudhatul Athfal's Compliance with National Standards in Bandung

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Abstract

The quality assurance of early childhood education in Islamic institutions such as Raudhatul Athfal (RA) has received limited empirical attention, particularly regarding the extent to which they fulfill the National Standards for Early Childhood Education. This study seeks to fill this gap by evaluating the learning quality of RA institutions in Baleendah District. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, data were collected from 50 RA educators through a validated and reliable Likert-scale questionnaire measuring eight dimensions of the national standards. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to calculate the percentage of achievement for each dimension. The findings indicate that overall learning quality in RA has met national standards, with notable strengths in exploration-based learning, collaborative pedagogy, and parental involvement. However, challenges remain in cognitive stimulation, the pedagogical competence of educators, and the adequacy of exploratory and extracurricular facilities. Limited funding emerged as a key barrier, constraining infrastructure development and teacher professional growth. Beyond its national relevance, this study contributes to the broader global scholarship on early childhood education by demonstrating how faith-based institutions operationalize educational quality within diverse cultural and moral frameworks. The findings enrich international understanding of how holistic and value-oriented learning can coexist with standardized educational benchmarks. This study introduces a perspective of contextualized quality, emphasizing that true educational excellence is achieved when pedagogical competence, moral education, and local wisdom are integrated into a coherent framework. Practically, it provides policy insights for strengthening teacher capacity, improving learning environments, and promoting collaborative engagement among stakeholders. Future studies are encouraged to adopt mixed-method and comparative approaches to deepen cross-cultural insights into the dynamics of early childhood education quality in Islamic contexts.

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Introduction

Globally, early childhood education (ECE) has been recognized as a critical foundation for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2020). Early education determines children's holistic growth encompassing cognitive, emotional, social, and moral dimensions, making it essential for shaping the next generation's competencies and values. However, many developing countries, including Indonesia, continue to face challenges in ensuring that ECE institutions meet developmental and pedagogical standards while integrating cultural and religious values that contribute to moral character formation (Winata et al., 2021). Within this national context, Raudhatul Athfal (RA) stands as an Islamic-based early childhood education institution under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, tasked with not only stimulating developmental domains but also instilling Islamic values from an early age (Nasution & Dalimunthe, 2021). This dual mission places RA at the intersection of national education goals and religious-cultural identity formation.

Despite this strategic role, empirical evidence indicates that the quality of learning at RA has not yet met the expected standards. Studies reveal persistent discrepancies between policy frameworks and implementation, with a notable gap between the regulatory guidelines and real classroom practices (Salman, 2022; Salman et al., 2022). Research on post-COVID-19 curriculum adaptation at RA Al-Akhyar also highlights difficulties related to teacher readiness, limited resources, and inadequate pedagogical strategies (Azzahro & Salama, 2022). Moreover, challenges such as poor infrastructure, insufficiently qualified teachers, and limited funding continue to constrain learning quality (Husnaini & Qadafi, 2021). These structural and instructional challenges threaten the realization of RA's dual mandate in achieving developmental outcomes aligned with the National Standards for Early Childhood Education (Permendikbud No. 137/2014) while transmitting religious and moral values contextually.

From a theoretical standpoint, the assessment of educational quality in early childhood can be explained through the Input–Process–Output model, which emphasizes that quality outcomes are shaped by the interaction between learning inputs such as teacher competence, facilities, and curriculum, and pedagogical processes that occur within classrooms (Creswell, 2018; Saepudin, 2017). In the Islamic education context, this model integrates the spiritual dimension represented in *tarbiyah* and *akhlak* which complement cognitive and socio-emotional development (Saragih & Qorib, 2025). Furthermore, theories of cognitive development by Piaget (1964) and socio-cultural learning by Vygotsky (1978) highlight that early childhood learning quality depends on structured interaction, exploration, and scaffolding. Therefore, examining RA through these theoretical lenses provides a comprehensive understanding of its educational quality that bridges both national and faith-based paradigms.

Empirical literature supports the crucial link between learning quality and developmental outcomes in early childhood. Studies have shown that exploration-based and play-centered learning significantly enhance social-emotional and cognitive development (Musthafa, 2017; Masnipal, 2018). However, most previous studies on RA have been limited to qualitative descriptions of curriculum management, teacher professionalism, or institutional governance (Salman et al., 2022; Ainnin & Ismail, 2024), rather than systematic quantitative assessments of compliance with national standards. Research by Juju Saepudin (2017) and Faiza A. Dali et al. (2025) further confirms that disparities across RAs, especially those in resource-constrained regions, reflect uneven policy implementation and teacher competence. Consequently, despite growing interest in Islamic early childhood education, empirical evidence on the achievement level of RA against national quality indicators remains limited and fragmented.

This research gap highlights the absence of quantitative, evidence-based evaluations of RA's learning quality within the framework of the National Standards for Early Childhood Education. While the Ministry of Religious Affairs has introduced the RA Curriculum (KMA No. 792/2018) to align with national regulations, there is still little clarity about the extent to which RAs comply with these standards in practice. Addressing this gap is essential to ensure that Islamic-based ECE institutions fulfill national quality benchmarks while remaining faithful to their spiritual and moral mandates. Empirical mapping of these standards is necessary to guide targeted interventions in teacher training, curriculum improvement, and infrastructure development.

The selection of Baleendah District, Bandung Regency, as the research location is based on its unique representativeness and contextual diversity. The area accommodates both urban and semi-rural RA institutions, which exhibit variations in access to resources, teacher qualifications, and institutional support from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This diversity allows for an in-depth analysis of how contextual differences influence the achievement of learning quality standards. Additionally, Baleendah is one of the regions actively implementing RA curriculum reforms post-pandemic, making it an ideal locus to evaluate compliance with the National Standards for Early Childhood Education (Azzahro & Salama, 2022; Rahardjo & Maryati, 2021).

Therefore, this study aims to quantitatively analyze the achievement of learning quality in Raudhatul Athfal (RA) by examining four key dimensions of the National Standards for Early Childhood Education, namely content, process, educator competence, and infrastructure. Using a structured and validated survey instrument, this research seeks to provide an objective and data-driven evaluation of RA's compliance levels across diverse institutional contexts. The novelty of this study lies in its explicit focus on Islamic-based early childhood institutions within the national education quality framework. Theoretically, it bridges the discourse between Islamic education and early childhood quality assurance; methodologically, it introduces a quantitative model aligned with national indicators; and practically, it offers evidence-based recommendations for policymakers to enhance the quality, equity, and religiosity of Islamic early childhood education in Indonesia.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design aimed at mapping the quality of learning in Raudhatul Athfal (RA) based on the National Standards for Early Childhood Education (Permendikbud No. 137 of 2014). This research design was considered most appropriate because it focused on measuring the level of compliance of RA institutions with existing standards rather than testing causal relationships (Creswell, 2018). The study emphasizes objective evaluation by quantifying the extent to which each dimension of the national standards has been achieved. The descriptive quantitative approach also provides a comprehensive view of learning quality variations across institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Population and Sample

The population in this study consisted of 256 educators working in Raudhatul Athfal (RA) institutions within Baleendah District, Bandung Regency. Baleendah was selected as the research site because it represents both urban and semi-rural contexts, which exhibit diverse institutional capacities, teacher qualifications, and access to educational resources. This contextual variation allowed the study to analyze how environmental and institutional differences influence learning quality. A total of 50 respondents were selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria included educators who had at least two years of teaching experience, formal early childhood education qualifications (minimum D2 or PGPAUD), and active employment in an RA institution officially registered under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The sample size, representing approximately 20 percent of the total population, was considered adequate for descriptive research (Sugiyono, 2020).

Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on the National Standards for Early Childhood Education (Permendikbud No. 137 of 2014) and validated through expert judgment involving three PAUD specialists and two RA practitioners. The instrument contained 50 items grouped into six key dimensions: (1) child development achievement, (2) curriculum and learning process, (3) educator competence, (4) facilities and infrastructure, (5) management and financing, and (6) learning assessment. Additionally, five supplementary indicators measured external contextual factors including parental cooperation, community collaboration, funding adequacy, learning management, and leadership. Each item was rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Validity was tested using the Pearson Product Moment correlation with item-total correlations ranging between 0.41 and 0.76. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha produced coefficients between 0.79 and 0.85, which exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Ghozali, 2018).

Data Collection

Data collection was carried out between March and April 2025 through paper-based questionnaires distributed directly to RA educators. The research team coordinated with RA principals to ensure compliance with ethical procedures and informed consent. Respondents

completed the questionnaires in person during scheduled school visits. This method ensured high response rates and allowed researchers to clarify any uncertainties related to questionnaire items. All collected data were then verified and tabulated before statistical processing.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS version 27 through descriptive and psychometric statistical procedures. The analysis involved validity and reliability testing, mean and standard deviation calculations, and percentage-based achievement mapping for each indicator. The results were categorized into levels of achievement to determine the compliance of each RA institution with the National Standards for Early Childhood Education. Inferential statistical analyses such as t-tests or ANOVA were not conducted since the study did not aim to identify causal relationships among variables. The focus was to present an objective mapping of the learning quality in Islamic-based early childhood institutions. Although the findings are specific to Baleendah District and may not be generalized to other regions, they provide valuable empirical insights for policy formulation, teacher development, and institutional capacity building in the broader context of Islamic early childhood education in Indonesia.

Result

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

The presentation of results in this study is organized according to the six dimensions of the National Standards for Early Childhood Education (Permendikbud No. 137/2014), which serve as the analytical framework. These dimensions include: (1) child development achievement, (2) curriculum implementation and learning process, (3) educator competence, (4) facilities and infrastructure, (5) management and financing, and (6) assessment system. In addition to these internal dimensions, the analysis also considers external supporting factors such as parental involvement, community support, and funding availability. Each subsection reports the level of standard achievement in RA institutions in Baleendah District, highlights areas of strength, and identifies aspects requiring improvement for optimizing learning quality.

The following description will explain in more detail the findings of the study related to each aspect analyzed:

Standards for Child Development Achievement Levels

To determine the accuracy of the research instrument in measuring child development indicators, the following validity test was conducted:

Table 1. Results of the Validity Test of Child Development Indicators

Indicators	$r_{\text{calculate}}$	r_{table}	Information
Cognitive Stimulus	,599**	0.297	Valid
Social-Emotional	,803**	0.297	Valid
Self-expression	,720**	0.297	Valid
Motor Stimulus	,769**	0.297	Valid
Active Exploratory	,702**	0.297	Valid

Source: Research Data, 2025

Furthermore, to ensure the consistency of the instrument, a reliability test was carried out on the five main indicators of child development:

Table 2. Reliability Test Results

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,750	5

The following table presents the percentage of achievement levels based on the five validated indicators of child development:

Table 3. Percentage of Child Development Achievement Rate

Standards for Child Development Achievement Levels				
Learning activities are designed to stimulate children's cognitive development.	Activities at RA support the development of children's emotional and social skills.	Children are allowed to express themselves through speaking or interacting activities.	The curriculum at RA includes the physical and fine motor development of children.	Learning in RA encourages children to learn through hands-on experience and exploration
Cognitive Stimulation	Social-Emotional	Self-expression	Motor Stimulation	Active Exploration
56%	74%	70%	70%	76%
40%	24%	28%	24%	24%
2%	2%	0%	4%	0%
2%	0%	2%	2%	0%

Source: Research Data, 2025

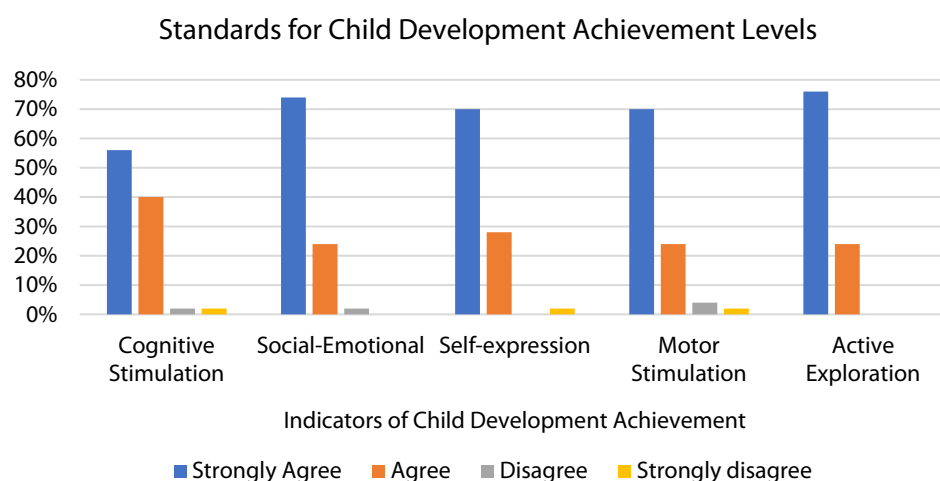


Figure 1. Standard Diagram of Child Development Achievement Level

Based on the research results on the Standard Child Development Achievement Level (Figure 1), the instrument used to measure learning quality in RA was found to be valid and reliable, with all indicators having r calculations greater than the r table value (0.297). Social-emotional indicators had the highest validity (0.803), while cognitive stimuli had the lowest validity (0.599). The reliability test produced a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.750, indicating the consistency of the instrument in measuring child development.

In the achievement analysis, the active exploration aspect showed the highest score (76%), which aligns with previous studies emphasizing that play-based and exploratory learning are naturally more dominant in early childhood education settings (Musthafa, 2017). This suggests that RA institutions in Baleendah effectively facilitate discovery-oriented activities, possibly due to the integration of thematic learning and outdoor play that resonates with children's curiosity. The social-emotional aspect (74%) also reached a high level, indicating that RA programs successfully nurture cooperation, empathy, and adaptability—skills that are often reinforced through group activities and collective worship practices, reflecting the communal culture in Islamic education. Similarly, the self-expression and motor stimulus dimension (70%) demonstrated satisfactory results, which can be attributed to routine arts, crafts, and physical activities commonly embedded in RA daily schedules.

In contrast, the cognitive stimulus dimension recorded the lowest attainment (56%). This finding reflects a persisting challenge in implementing interactive and problem-solving-based approaches that foster critical thinking in early childhood (Winata et al., 2021). Limited teacher

competence in designing inquiry-based activities and reliance on traditional rote methods may contribute to this lower achievement. Moreover, while a majority of children fall into the high achievement category (56%–76%), a considerable proportion remains in the low category (24%–40%), particularly in cognitive development. This variation underscores the need for targeted teacher training in child-centered pedagogies and curriculum enrichment to balance cognitive growth with other developmental aspects.

Recommendations for improvement include strengthening cognitive stimulation through exploration and educational games, optimizing experiential learning, and maintaining effective strategies in building social interaction and regulating children's emotions. This aims to make children's development more balanced and RA learning more optimal.

Standards for Educators and Education Personnel

The following validity test results show the accuracy of the indicators in measuring the competencies of educators and educational staff:

Table 4. Results of the Educators and Education Personnel Indicator Validity Test

Indicators	r _{calculate}	r _{table}	Information
Pedagogic Competence	,833**	0.297	Valid
Learning Differentiation	,636**	0.297	Valid
Play-Based Learning	,838**	0.297	Valid
Methodological Competence	,828**	0.297	Valid
Communication Competencies	,714**	0.297	Valid

Source: Research Data, 2025

A reliability test was conducted to assess the consistency of the five indicators, as shown below:

Table 5. Reliability Test Results

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,832	5

The following table presents the percentage of achievement levels related to the competencies of educators and educational staff:

Table 6. Percentage of Educators and Education Personnel Competency

Standards for Educators and Education Personnel				
Educators at RA have a deep understanding of early childhood psychology.	Educators at RA can provide learning that is tailored to the needs and interests of children	RA educators actively engage children in challenging but still fun activities.	RA educators have skills in using a variety of appropriate learning methods	RA educators communicate effectively with children and parents regarding child development
Pedagogic Competence	Learning Differentiation	Play-Based Learning	Methodological Competence	Communication Competencies
50%	62%	62%	58%	58%
48%	38%	36%	40%	42%
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2%	0%	2%	2%	0%

Source: Research Data, 2025

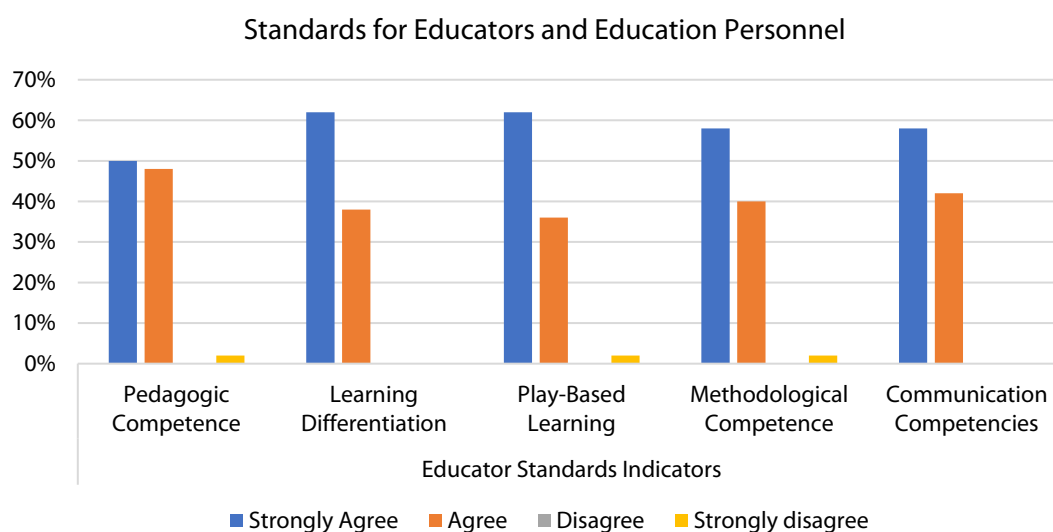


Figure 2. Educators and Education Personnel Standard Diagram

The results of the validity test showed that all research indicators were valid with an r calculation greater than the r table (0.297). The indicator with the highest validity is play-based learning (0.838), while the lowest is learning differentiation (0.636). The reliability test produced a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.832, showing high consistency in measuring the quality of educators and education personnel in RA.

The achievement level analysis (Figure 2) showed that pedagogic competence reached 50%, while differentiation of learning and play-based learning was slightly higher at 62%. Methodological and communication competencies stood at 58%. These figures place the majority of educators in the high achievement category (50%–62%), with around 36%–48% in the intermediate category and none in the very low category (0%–2%), indicating that RA educators broadly align with the minimum standards set by the National PAUD Standards (Permendikbud No. 137/2014). The relatively higher scores in differentiation and play-based learning may reflect the influence of continuous training programs provided by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and local education offices, which often emphasize child-centered and play-based approaches as core pedagogical strategies (Suryana, 2013). Meanwhile, the lower performance in pedagogic competence suggests challenges in translating theoretical knowledge into practice, a common issue in early childhood settings where many teachers enter the profession with limited formal qualifications. The absence of educators in the “very low” category can be interpreted as a positive outcome of certification and professional development policies that have raised the baseline quality of RA teachers nationwide (RI, 2021). Nonetheless, the gap between intermediate and high categories highlights the ongoing need for institutional support, mentoring systems, and access to innovative teaching resources to ensure that all educators consistently apply developmentally appropriate practices in line with national standards and Islamic values.

Recommendations for improvement include increasing pedagogic competence through child psychology training, strengthening learning differentiation, and optimizing play-based learning. In addition, the improvement of methodological competence and communication of educators with children and parents needs to be strengthened to support children's development more effectively.

Content Standards and Learning Process

The validity of five indicators for assessing the content and learning process standards is presented in the table below:

Table 7. Results of the Validity Test of Learning Indicators

Indicators	r _{calculate}	r _{table}	Information
Structured Learning	,808**	0.297	Valid
Holistic Approach	,738**	0.297	Valid
Collaborative Learning	,813**	0.297	Valid
Media-Based Learning	,813**	0.297	Valid
Character Education	,786**	0.297	Valid

Source: Research Data, 2025

To examine the internal consistency of the instrument, a reliability test was performed on the following indicators:

Table 8. Reliability Test Results

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,848	5

The table below displays the distribution of percentage achievement for each indicator of content and learning process standards:

Table 9. Percentage of Content and Learning Standards

Content Standards and Learning Process				
The learning process in RA integrates play activities with clear learning objectives	The methods used in learning in RA can facilitate the development of all aspects of children	Learning activities in RA are designed so that children actively participate and collaborate	The learning provided in RA involves the use of tools and media that support children's development	Learning in RA includes activities that introduce children to social and religious values.
Structured Learning	Holistic Approach	Collaborative Learning	Media-Based Learning	Character Education
52%	50%	68%	62%	64%
46%	50%	30%	38%	36%
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2%	0%	2%	0%	0%

Source: Research Data, 2025

Content Standards and Learning Process

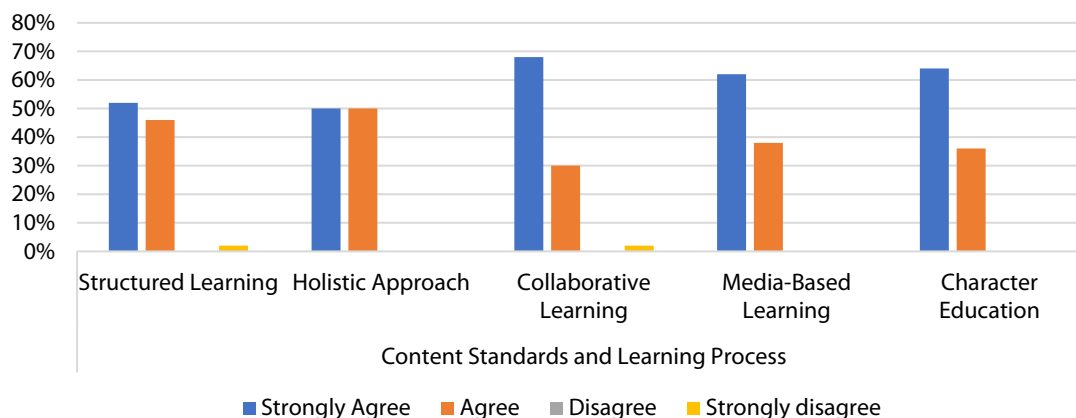


Figure 3. Content and Learning Standard Diagram

The results show that the standard measurement instrument of content and learning process in RA is valid and reliable, with all indicators having r calculation greater than the r table (0.297). Collaborative and media-based learning had the highest validity (0.813), while the holistic approach had the lowest validity (0.738). The reliability test yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.848, indicating a consistent and trustworthy instrument.

In the achievement analysis (Figure 3), collaborative learning had the highest achievement (68%), followed by character education (64%) and media-based learning (62%). However, structured learning (52%) and holistic approach (50%) still need reinforcement. The majority of aspects are in the high achievement category (50%-68%), although there are still 30%-50% of educators in the intermediate achievement category.

Recommendations for improvement include improving structured learning with a more systematic curriculum, strengthening a holistic approach to balancing child development, and further developing collaborative and media-based learning. Character education that is already good enough needs to be strengthened so that children in RA grow up with stronger social and religious values.

Facilities and Infrastructure Standards

The following table presents the validity test results of indicators used to assess the standards of facilities and infrastructure in RA:

Table 10. Results of the Validity Test of Facilities and Infrastructure Indicators

Indicators	r calculate	r table	Information
Safe Facilities	,774**	0.297	Valid
Adaptive Learning Facilities	,796**	0.297	Valid
Exploratory Environment	,763**	0.297	Valid
Hygienic Facilities	,815**	0.297	Valid
Extracurricular Facilities	,727**	0.297	Valid

Source: Research Data, 2025

A reliability test was conducted on five indicators to ensure consistency of the measurement tool, as follows:

Table 11. Reliability Test Results

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,826	5

The table below shows the percentage of achievement for each indicator related to facilities and infrastructure standards:

Table 12. Percentage of Facilities and Infrastructure Standards

Facilities and Infrastructure Standards				
Learning facilities at RA such as classrooms and play areas have met safety standards	The learning tools available in RA vary and suit the age of the child	The physical environment in RA supports children to move freely and explore	Sanitation and hygiene facilities in RA have met health standards for children	There are adequate facilities to support children's extra-curricular activities outside of school hours
Safe Facilities	Adaptive Learning Facilities	Exploratory Environment	Hygienic Facilities	Extracurricular Facilities
54%	54%	60%	54%	40%
42%	46%	40%	46%	52%
2%	0%	0%	0%	8%
2%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Research Data, 2025

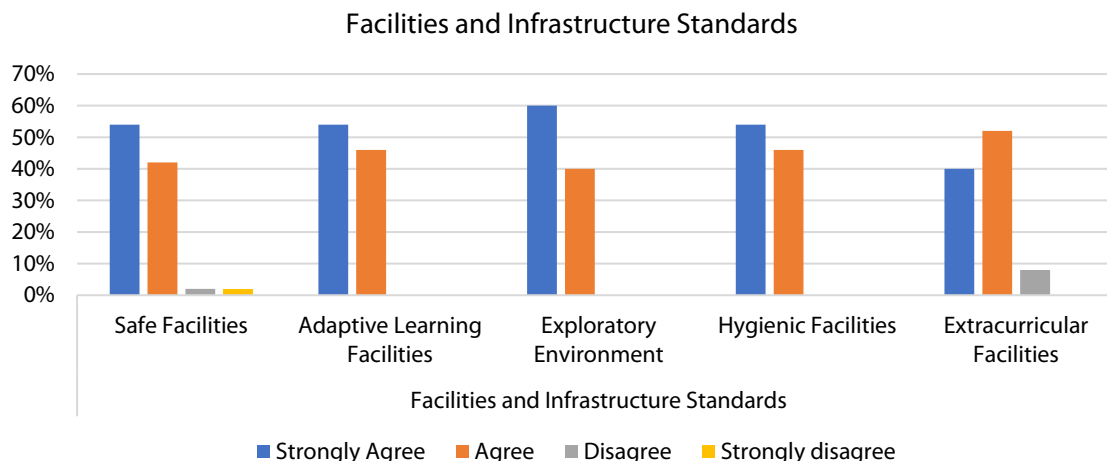


Figure 4. Standard Diagram of Facilities and Infrastructure

The results show that the standard measurement instruments of facilities and infrastructure in RA are valid and reliable, with all indicators having an r calculation greater than the r table (0.297). Hygienic facilities have the highest validity (0.815), followed by adaptive learning facilities (0.796) and safe facilities (0.774). Meanwhile, extracurricular facilities have the lowest validity (0.727), although they are still in the valid category. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.826 indicates that the instrument has high reliability.

In the achievement analysis, the exploratory environment had the highest achievement (60%), while safe facilities, adaptive learning facilities, and hygienic facilities had an achievement of 54%. However, extracurricular facilities have the lowest achievement (40%), indicating a lack of facilities to support additional activities for children. Most aspects were in the intermediate achievement category (40%-60%), with 42%-52% of respondents showing low achievement in some aspects, especially extracurricular facilities.

Recommendations for improvement include the provision of more extracurricular facilities, the development of adaptive learning facilities, the improvement of environmental cleanliness, and the optimization of exploratory environments to continue to support children's development. With this improvement, the standards of facilities and infrastructure in RA can be more optimal in supporting learning by the National Standards for Early Childhood Education.

Learning Assessment Standards

The validity test of the five assessment indicators is presented below to determine their suitability for measuring learning assessment standards in RA:

Table 13. Results of the Validity Test of Learning Assessment Indicators

Indicators	r calculate	r table	Information
Continuous Assessment	,723**	0.297	Valid
Process Assessment	,797**	0.297	Valid
Authentic Assessment	,861**	0.297	Valid
Formative Assessment	,826**	0.297	Valid
Comprehensive Assessment	,809**	0.297	Valid

Source: Research Data, 2025

To ensure the consistency of the instrument in assessing learning, the reliability test results are shown in the following table:

Table 14. Reliability Test Results

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,856	5

The following table presents the percentage of achievement for each learning assessment indicator used in this study:

Table 15. Percentage of Learning Assessment Standards

Learning Assessment Standards				
Learning evaluations are carried out regularly to monitor children's development	The assessment method in RA emphasizes more on the child's learning process than on the final result	Assessment of children's learning outcomes in RA is carried out using various techniques such as observation and portfolios	Evaluation of learning in RA involves constructive feedback for both children and parents	Children's development records are monitored and shared regularly with parents to discuss the results of the evaluation
Continuous Assessment	Process Assessment	Authentic Assessment	Formative Assessment	Comprehensive Assessment
56%	48%	40%	46%	50%
42%	52%	60%	54%	50%
0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
2%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Source: Research Data, 2025

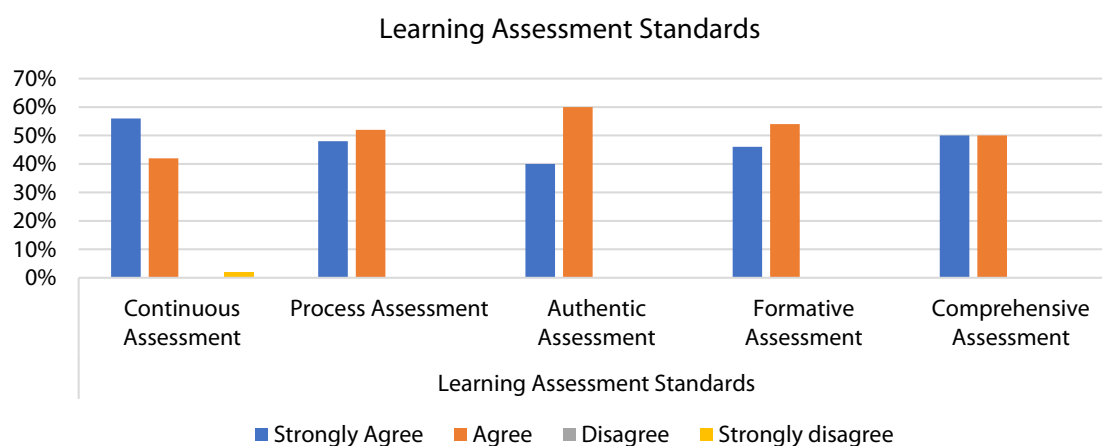


Figure 5. Learning Assessment Standard Diagram

Authentic assessments had the highest validity (0.861), followed by formative assessments (0.826) and comprehensive assessments (0.809). Meanwhile, the continuous assessment has the lowest validity (0.723) but remains in the valid category. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.856 indicates high reliability, indicating consistent and reliable measurement results. In the achievement analysis, continuous assessment had the highest achievement (56%), indicating that learning evaluations have been carried out regularly. The comprehensive assessment has an achievement of 50%, indicating that monitoring the child's development is already underway but can still be improved. However, the authentic assessment only reached 40%, indicating that observation- and portfolio-based techniques have not been optimally implemented. Formative assessments reached 46%, indicating the need for improvement in providing more constructive feedback.

The distribution of achievement showed that most aspects were in the medium to high category (40%-56%), with about 42%-60% of respondents showing low achievement in authentic and formative assessments. However, no aspects with a very low level of achievement (0%-2%) were found, indicating that the learning assessment standards in RA are generally by national standards.

Recommendations for improvement include the implementation of more systematic authentic assessments, increased feedback in formative assessments, strengthening monitoring

systems in continuous assessments, and the development of process-based approaches to focus more on child development. With this increase, assessment standards in RA can be more optimal in supporting children's development by the National Standards for Early Childhood Education.

Factors Affecting the Quality of Learning in RA

In addition to analyzing the internal dimensions of learning quality based on the National Standards for PAUD, this study also examined several external contextual factors that influence the overall quality of learning in RA. These factors—including parental involvement, community support, and institutional funding—were measured through additional questionnaire items designed to capture the extent of stakeholder engagement and resource availability. By presenting these factors after the discussion of internal standards, the analysis provides a more holistic view of the conditions shaping RA learning quality, emphasizing that both institutional practices and external supports jointly determine the effectiveness of early childhood education.

The validity of the five indicators measuring supporting factors of learning quality in RA is displayed in the following table:

Table 16. Results of the Validity Test of Learning Quality Supporting Factors Indicators

Indicators	$r_{\text{calculate}}$	r_{table}	Information
Parent Cooperation	,674**	0.297	Valid
Community Collaboration	,833**	0.297	Valid
Adequate Funds	,806**	0.297	Valid
Learning Management	,792**	0.297	Valid
Leadership	,738**	0.297	Valid

Source: Research Data, 2025

A reliability test was conducted on the five supporting factor indicators to ensure consistency, as shown below:

Table 17. Reliability Test Results

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,826	5

The table below outlines the percentage of achievement for each factor influencing learning quality in RA:

Table 18. Percentage of Factors Supporting Learning Quality

Factors Affecting the Quality of Learning in RA				
Support from parents has a great influence on the development of children's learning in RA	The involvement of the surrounding community in the development of RA helps improve the quality of learning	The financial resources available at RA are sufficient to support quality learning activities	RA management supports the implementation of quality and organized learning	The leadership of the head of RA plays an important role in managing and improving the quality of learning in RA
Parent Cooperation	Community Collaboration	Adequate Funds	Learning Management	Leadership
72%	46%	36%	48%	70%
28%	52%	60%	52%	30%
0%	0%	2%	0%	0%
0%	2%	2%	0%	0%

Source: Research Data, 2025

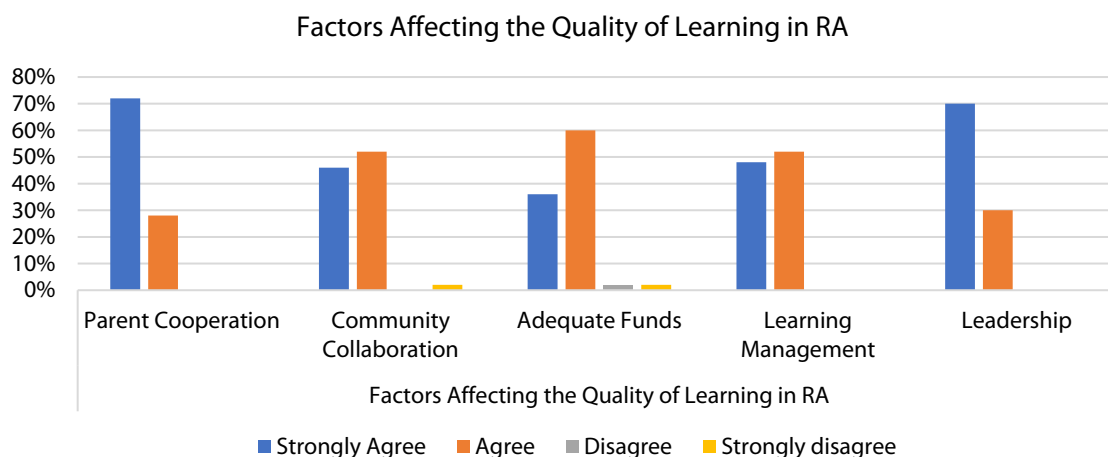


Figure 6. Diagram of Factors Supporting Learning Quality

The results of the study show that the instrument for measuring factors that affect the quality of learning in RA is valid and reliable. All indicators had r calculations greater than r tables (0.297), with the highest validity on community collaboration (0.833), adequate funding (0.806), and learning management (0.792). The indicator with the lowest validity is parental cooperation (0.674), but it is still in the valid category. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.826 indicates high reliability, indicating consistent and reliable measurement results. In the achievement analysis, the aspect of parental cooperation had the highest achievement rate (72%), showing that parental support played a major role in improving the quality of learning. The leadership of the head of RA also has high achievements (70%), indicating that the strategic role of the head of RA is quite optimal in managing education.

However, some aspects still have lower achievements. Community collaboration only reached 46%, indicating that community involvement in RA development was not optimal. Adequate funds have achieved 36%, indicating that limited financial resources are still a major challenge. Learning management reached 48%, indicating the need to strengthen the learning management system to be more effective and organized.

The distribution of achievement shows that most aspects are in the medium to high category (36%-72%). Around 52%-60% of respondents showed low achievement, inadequate funding, and community collaboration. However, the very low achievement rate (0%-2%) was almost non-existent, indicating that the factors that support the quality of learning in RA are generally by national standards, although there are still obstacles.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that Raudhatul Athfal (RA) institutions in Baleendah District generally comply with the National Standards for Early Childhood Education; however, disparities remain across developmental domains, particularly in cognitive stimulation and pedagogical competence. This indicates that the challenge is not mere compliance with standards, but ensuring consistent and balanced quality across all learning dimensions (Rahardjo & Maryati, 2021). Strong performance was evident in exploratory and collaborative learning, reflecting the effectiveness of play-based pedagogy and teacher engagement in thematic instructional training (Hapidin et al., 2020). The emphasis on collective values in Islamic early childhood settings has also strengthened social collaboration and cooperative learning among children (Ningsih et al., 2025). Furthermore, the effective implementation of continuous assessment systems can be attributed to standardized instruments and monitoring frameworks disseminated by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud, 2015; Nurbiana & Fitriani, 2022).

Parental participation was found to be a strong contributing factor to learning quality, particularly in reinforcing home-school collaboration and supporting children's learning continuity (Utami, 2022). Nevertheless, cognitive stimulation remains the weakest dimension, suggesting insufficient emphasis on problem-solving and higher-order thinking activities (Alotaibi, 2024). According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children in the preoperational stage (ages 2–7) learn best through concrete and exploratory experiences (Piaget, 1952; Rabindran & Madanagopal, 2020). The limited provision of interactive and inquiry-based learning activities in RA institutions implies that exploration is not yet fully optimized as a means of developing abstract reasoning and creativity (Prins et al., 2022). Thus, enhancing inquiry-based and project-oriented pedagogy is essential to strengthen cognitive readiness and future learning skills among children.

Theoretically, these findings can be explained through Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which posits that children achieve higher levels of understanding when provided with adequate scaffolding by more competent peers or adults (Vygotsky, 1978). Within RA settings, insufficient teacher scaffolding and resource limitations hinder children from reaching their full developmental potential (Mcleod, 2024). This condition highlights the urgent need to reinforce guided learning interactions, particularly through teacher facilitation of discovery-based and play-integrated activities. Strategies such as problem-based and project-based learning are effective for promoting critical thinking, creativity, and cognitive flexibility (Masnipal, 2018). Strengthening these approaches would bridge the gap between developmental potential and learning achievement, ensuring more holistic child growth.

Educator competence emerged as a critical determinant of learning quality, as pedagogical expertise directly influences the effectiveness of classroom practices (Raihana et al., 2021). The relatively low score in pedagogical competence (50%) reflects limited mastery of developmental psychology and individualized teaching strategies among RA teachers (Irvine et al., 2024). The positive implementation of play-based learning is consistent with Montessori's theory, which argues that structured exploration facilitates meaningful learning (Saha & Adhikari, 2023). However, the insufficient application of differentiated instruction suggests a lack of reflective understanding of children's diverse learning needs (Astuti & Yafie, 2025). Therefore, continuous professional development, peer mentoring, and stronger school–parent collaboration are essential for enhancing teachers' pedagogical competence and adaptive capacity (Septianti & Afiani, 2020).

Regarding the learning process and curriculum content, RA institutions demonstrate substantial progress in collaborative and character-based education but have yet to fully realize a holistic integration of cognitive, socio-emotional, and moral domains (As'ad et al., 2025; Chand, 2023). Vygotsky's social interaction theory emphasizes that children learn through meaningful exchanges with teachers and peers, which shape higher psychological functions (Topçiu & Myftiu, 2015). However, findings suggest that the RA curriculum still prioritizes ritual and moral habituation at the expense of exploratory and expressive learning. This imbalance reveals a tension between regulatory compliance and spiritual identity formation. Integrating project-based learning, storytelling, and thematic exploration is recommended to foster balanced development aligned with the principles of holistic education promoted by UNESCO (2015).

Facilities and infrastructure also play a vital role in supporting effective learning environments for young children. A safe, hygienic, and explorative physical setting enhances engagement, motivation, and socio-emotional stability (Barrett et al., 2019). Although RA institutions generally meet safety and hygiene standards (Koenarso & Aziza, 2022), exploratory and extracurricular facilities remain underdeveloped. According to Gardner's multiple

intelligences framework, providing diverse exploratory resources helps nurture children's kinesthetic, musical, and naturalistic intelligences (Jaya et al., 2023). Therefore, strengthening extracurricular programs such as arts, sports, and nature-based learning can enhance creativity, motor skills, and curiosity, aligning with best practices in social-emotional learning (Jones et al., 2017).

Assessment practices in RA institutions largely follow national guidelines but are inconsistently applied across classrooms. Authentic assessments using observation and portfolios provide richer insights into children's learning processes compared to standardized testing (Roslan et al., 2022; Ozan, 2019). However, many educators still rely on summative evaluations, missing opportunities to track developmental progress formatively (Buza & Bica, 2022). Strengthening portfolio-based reporting and feedback mechanisms can improve teachers' ability to identify developmental needs early and communicate them effectively to parents (Peterson & Elam, 2020). As a result, assessment should be re-envisioned not only as a measurement tool but also as a pedagogical process that guides individualized learning improvement.

External contextual factors, including parental engagement, community collaboration, and funding adequacy, strongly influence the sustainability of learning quality in RA institutions (Epstein, 2018). While parental cooperation achieved the highest score, community participation and financial support remain weak, constraining institutional innovation (Bunyamin, 2018). Adequate funding is essential for maintaining infrastructure, expanding teacher training, and developing child-centered curricula (Nurcahyanti et al., 2024). Hence, strategic partnerships with communities, private sectors, and government grant programs are needed to strengthen institutional resilience and learning equity. These findings reaffirm that quality assurance in Islamic early childhood education is an adaptive process that integrates pedagogical, institutional, and socio-religious factors into a coherent framework.

The insights drawn from this study reach beyond the local context, offering a deeper understanding of how faith-based early childhood institutions translate national quality standards into daily educational practice while preserving their spiritual and cultural identity. The findings suggest that true quality in Islamic early education emerges from the balance between pedagogical strength and moral formation, rather than from compliance alone. This balance highlights a more humanized and value-oriented view of quality assurance, one that sees children not only as learners but as developing moral beings shaped by both knowledge and faith. The study also opens a space for dialogue between global and local perspectives, showing that models of quality rooted in Islamic educational contexts can meaningfully enrich international discussions on early childhood education. At the same time, the study acknowledges its own limits, as the regional scope and quantitative focus may not fully capture the lived cultural dynamics of RA institutions; future research should therefore explore these complexities through comparative and mixed-method approaches that bridge policy, pedagogy, and community realities.

Conclusion

This study examined how Raudhatul Athfal (RA) fulfills the National Standards for Early Childhood Education while identifying areas that still require improvement. The results show that RA institutions have achieved notable strengths in exploratory and collaborative learning, play-based pedagogy, and continuous assessment. However, cognitive stimulation, educator competence, infrastructure, and sustainable funding remain areas of concern. These findings highlight that quality assurance in Islamic early childhood education cannot be reduced to regulatory compliance alone but must be understood as a dynamic interplay of pedagogical, institutional, and socio-cultural elements that shape children's holistic development. The

evidence indicates that meaningful quality emerges where teacher competence, parental engagement, and contextual resources interact to create learning environments that are both developmentally and spiritually enriching. This view reinforces the importance of approaching quality not as a fixed benchmark but as an evolving practice shaped by values, community participation, and reflective pedagogy.

Beyond its local context, the study offers broader insights that contribute to the global discourse on early childhood education. It presents a contextualized model of quality assurance grounded in Islamic educational philosophy, thereby expanding global understandings of how faith-based institutions integrate moral and cognitive development within standardized frameworks. This model challenges the dominance of secular, outcome-oriented approaches to educational quality by emphasizing the role of spirituality, collective values, and moral reasoning in shaping learning experiences. The study's practical implications lie in guiding educators and policymakers toward designing training programs, curriculum models, and funding mechanisms that are both culturally responsive and globally relevant. Nonetheless, its regional focus and quantitative orientation limit the depth of cultural interpretation, suggesting the need for mixed-method, longitudinal, and cross-country studies that further explore the interplay between faith, pedagogy, and educational quality. Through this perspective, the study invites a global dialogue on how educational systems can achieve quality that honors both universal developmental principles and local moral wisdom.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: study conception, design, and data collection: Tri Yugo; analysis and interpretation of results: Masnival.

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Data availability statement

The data supporting this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Access to raw data containing respondent information will be granted for academic purposes only and in compliance with ethical and privacy requirements.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Additional information

This study assessed the learning quality of Raudhatul Athfal (RA) in accordance with Indonesia's National Standards for Early Childhood Education. Data were obtained through structured questionnaires completed by educators, following ethical research procedures and maintaining respondent confidentiality. The study contributes to the field of early childhood education by providing empirical insights for enhancing teacher competence, curriculum implementation, and learning facilities. Data supporting the results of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical and privacy considerations.

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