



Teacher Strategies for Improving Learning Quality in an Integrated Islamic Kindergarten

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Abstract

Improving kindergarten learning requires coordination between developmentally appropriate teaching, institutional support, and family participation. This study describes teachers' strategies for improving learning quality at TK IT Mutiara Cendekia, Lubuklinggau, and examines the conditions supporting and constraining their implementation. A qualitative descriptive design was employed during April–May 2026. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving one principal, four teachers, and four parents. Analysis followed data reduction, data display, and conclusion verification, with source triangulation used to compare perspectives. The findings identify an interconnected strategy comprising flexible planning, play and learning centres, differentiated assistance, concrete learning materials, Islamic habituation, continuous assessment, and parent communication. Teachers adapted activities to children's interests, developmental differences, and fluctuating attention. Professional development, leadership, and a supportive environment facilitated implementation, while limited media variety and uneven family participation remained constraints. The study contributes a contextual account of how classroom adaptation and organisational support operate together. These findings describe perceived and observed improvements in learning processes rather than statistically established intervention effects.

Keywords: Teacher strategies; Learning quality; Kindergarten; Play; Partnerships

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INTRODUCTION

Learning quality in early childhood education is expressed in the experiences children encounter each day: whether they participate willingly, interact safely, explore meaningful materials, and receive assistance appropriate to their development. A classroom may have an attractive programme but still offer uneven opportunities if activities are inflexible or teachers cannot respond to individual children. Conversely, modest resources can support purposeful learning when teachers connect planning, interaction, assessment, and family communication. Understanding quality therefore requires attention to the decisions through which teachers organise children's participation, rather than concentrating only on the availability of facilities or the completion of planned content.

This issue is particularly relevant in an integrated Islamic kindergarten, where learning encompasses language, cognition, movement, social relationships, and religious habituation. Teachers must connect these areas without turning the school day into a succession of disconnected exercises. Religious routines also need to become experiences children can



observe and practise, rather than demands for verbal recall alone. TK IT Mutiara Cendekia in Lubuklinggau provides a setting in which these responsibilities intersect. Its teachers organise play, learning centres, exploration, and recurring religious activities while responding to differences in children's interests, confidence, and readiness.

Learning materials form another part of this relationship. In kindergarten, concrete objects and familiar environmental materials can connect an explanation with something children can handle, observe, and describe. Their educational value depends on how they are used. An elaborate tool that children only watch may offer less participation than a simple object incorporated into a purposeful activity. Resource quality and teacher creativity should therefore be considered together, while recognising that creativity does not remove the need for adequate institutional provision.

Existing discussions of strategies, professionalism, media, and partnerships provide useful concepts, but a contextual question remains: how are these components combined in everyday kindergarten practice? Listing recommended methods does not explain how teachers manage fluctuating attention, different developmental levels, limited media variety, and parent expectations within the same programme. The present study addresses this practical relationship through the experiences of the principal, teachers, and parents at TK IT Mutiara Cendekia. Its focus is the configuration of strategies and enabling conditions, rather than the isolated effect of one instructional technique.

Recent international evidence makes the distinction between provision and process especially relevant. A synthesis of 185 articles found small associations between ECEC quality and several developmental outcomes, while also showing that indicators cannot be treated as interchangeable (von Suchodoletz *et al.*, 2023). Research on classroom playfulness identifies greater involvement during playful activities (Strasser *et al.*, 2024), but longitudinal work on interaction quality and playfulness reports a more complex relationship, including no simple positive association across all dimensions (Rüdisüli *et al.*, 2024). These findings justify examining what teachers actually do with activities and materials instead of assuming that a well-equipped or busy classroom necessarily offers equally meaningful learning.

Guided play is also not a single uniform method. Evidence supports advantages for selected outcomes rather than an unconditional superiority over other approaches (Skene *et al.*, 2022). Teachers' orientations towards play are connected with the assessment practices they use (Pyle *et al.*, 2022). This makes the relationship between child choice, adult assistance, and observation an important analytical focus. In an integrated Islamic kindergarten, that relationship must also accommodate religious routines and the developmental differences visible during collective activities.

Professional learning supplies another part of the explanation. Research on courses and coaching for pre-service educators (Hu *et al.*, 2022) and an online programme for toddler educators (LoCasale-Crouch *et al.*, 2023) examines how teachers learn to notice and enact effective interactions. A Norwegian trial similarly demonstrates that sustained professional support can change interaction quality (Buøen *et al.*, 2021). These studies establish the relevance of professional learning, but they do not explain how a particular school assembles training, supervision, available materials, and parent communication within its daily programme. That contextual relationship is the gap addressed here.

The study asks two questions. First, what strategies do teachers use to improve learning quality at the kindergarten? Second, which conditions support or constrain the implementation of those strategies? The contribution is an integrated description of planning, classroom activity, assessment, leadership, and family involvement in one educational setting. By examining connections between these elements, the article identifies actionable points for school improvement while preserving the contextual limits of qualitative evidence. References to improvement are consequently interpreted through observed processes and participant accounts, rather than as estimates of measured learning gains.

METHODS

Research Design and Context

The study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine teachers' strategies and the conditions surrounding their implementation in ordinary kindergarten practice. Fieldwork took place at TK IT Mutiara Cendekia, Lubuklinggau, South Sumatra, during April–May 2026. This integrated Islamic kindergarten combines developmental learning activities with religious habituation. Classroom routines, centre activities, teacher guidance, and school–family communication formed the research context. The design sought a contextual explanation of practice rather than an experimental comparison.

Participants and Sampling

Nine adult informants participated: one principal, four teachers, and four parents. Their selection reflected direct involvement in managing, implementing, or supporting the learning programme. The principal supplied information about curriculum direction, supervision, facilities, and staff development. Teachers described planning, classroom strategies, assessment, and practical difficulties. Parents contributed perspectives on children's school experiences and continuity at home. Children's participation was observed during learning activities, but a separate numerical roster of observed children was not reported. Adult interview participation is therefore distinguished from classroom observation.

Instruments and Materials

The researcher served as the primary instrument, using observation, interview questions, and document review to address the research questions. Observation focused on activity organisation, learning media, teacher–child interaction, differentiation, and children's participation. Interview topics included planning, methods, evaluation, institutional support, constraints, and responses to difficulties. Documentation provided information about the school and its programme. Table 1 identifies the contributions of each informant group and the complementary evidence used in analysis. No psychometric scale or numerical measure of instrument reliability was used.

Table 1. Informant groups and contributions to the qualitative evidence

Informants	Number	Main contribution
Principal	1	School direction, supervision, facilities, development and evaluation
Teachers	4	Planning, methods, differentiation, media and classroom difficulties
Parents	4	Children's experiences and continuity between school and home
Total adult informants	9	Complemented by classroom observation and documentation

Note. Children's classroom participation was observed; a separate child observation sample size was not reported.

Procedure and Data Collection

Data were collected in the school's natural learning environment, including activities at the beginning, middle, and end of the school day. The researcher observed how teachers organised learning and responded to children, obtained explanations through interviews, and examined supporting documentation. Accounts from the principal, teachers, and parents were compared to identify practices recognised across roles and conditions experienced differently. Interview duration, a fixed number of observations, and an audio-recording schedule were not specified; none is retrospectively assigned in this report.

Data Analysis

Analysis followed the interactive process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Material relevant to teaching strategies was

organised into planning, play and centres, religious routines, materials, individual assistance, assessment, and family communication. Supporting and constraining conditions were then linked with those practices. Source triangulation compared institutional, classroom, and family accounts. Observation and documentation helped contextualise the reported practices. The analytical synthesis identifies relationships within the case without converting interview agreement into frequencies or effect sizes.

Ethical Considerations

Personal names of staff and families are not used in reporting, and children are discussed collectively. The article presents educational practices without disclosing child-level identifiers. A formal ethics-review identifier and a detailed consent protocol were not available in the research documentation; no undocumented approval or consent procedure is claimed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Figure 1 presents the relationship between observation, planning, enactment, and review as an analytical synthesis of the case. Leadership and family communication provide the surrounding support; the diagram does not represent a statistically tested causal model.

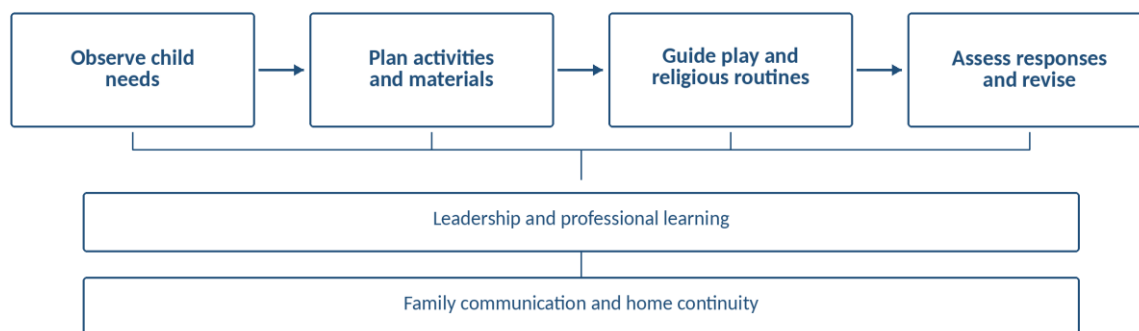


Figure 1. Analytical relationship between classroom adaptation and supporting conditions

Flexible Planning Around Children's Development

Planning began with attention to children's characteristics rather than the mechanical completion of a fixed schedule. Teachers described observing interests, abilities, and developmental readiness before organising activities. Daily plans, or RPPH, were expected to remain flexible and contextual. The principal emphasised integrating cognitive, language, social and emotional, and motor development instead of allowing one domain to dominate. This approach positioned planning as a basis for responsive teaching: activities had intended purposes, but their difficulty and delivery could be adjusted to the children present.

A classroom teacher described the planning approach as follows: "I first observe the character, interests, and developmental stage of each child, then prepare a flexible plan centred on the child." This translated excerpt illustrates how observation was connected with preparation rather than treated as a separate administrative task.

Teachers connected this flexibility to differentiation. Initial observation and simple assessment helped them identify children who needed additional explanation or assistance. Activities and media were then selected with those differences in mind. The findings do not identify a formal differentiation instrument or a quantified allocation of support. They nevertheless show that teachers recognised variation as a planning issue rather than treating all children as equally ready. This distinction matters because a uniform activity may appear orderly while offering insufficient challenge for some children and excessive demands for others.

The principal's account added an organisational dimension. Teachers were guided to prepare activities that were varied, child-centred, and balanced across developmental areas. Discussion, supervision, and collective reflection supported this process. Planning was therefore not presented as an individual administrative task completed in isolation. It was connected to professional guidance and the review of classroom experience. The principal's role was to establish expectations and support teachers in interpreting them, while teachers retained responsibility for responding to children during implementation.

Play and Learning Centres as Organising Practices

Learning through play was the principal instructional orientation. Reported methods included storytelling, singing, role play, simple projects, demonstration, and exploration of the surrounding environment. Teachers also used centres and small groups to create opportunities for participation and interaction. The school's account referred to centre and circle approaches, including Beyond Centers and Circle Time. These practices gave children multiple ways to encounter learning content rather than depending on prolonged whole-class verbal instruction.

The centre activities included nature, art, faith and piety, preparation, blocks, bodily movement, and large- and small-scale role play. Their significance lies in the range of participation they made possible. Block and preparation activities could organise manipulation and early conceptual work; role play created opportunities for language and social interaction; art and movement allowed expression through different forms. These are descriptions of the programme's organisation, not separately measured effects of each centre. The evidence does not establish that one centre produced better outcomes than another.

Teachers described small groups as helpful for attending to children more closely. Group organisation also responded to the difficulty of maintaining attention during extended activities. Changing methods and shortening tasks were used to sustain involvement. The reported strategy was not to remove structure but to make structure compatible with young children's participation. Teachers combined clear routines with opportunities for exploration, allowing activities to remain purposeful while reducing dependence on children's ability to sit and listen for long periods.

Parents' accounts broadly supported the description of enjoyable and varied learning. They reported children's enthusiasm for attending school and their willingness to recount experiences involving play, songs, and friends. These accounts indicate that children's experiences were meaningful enough to be discussed beyond the classroom. They do not independently measure developmental progress, but they add a family perspective to teachers' descriptions of engagement. Convergence across roles supports the finding that enjoyment and participation were central features of the programme.

Islamic Habituation Within the Daily Programme

Religious learning was integrated into recurring activities. The fieldwork describes collective morning habituation followed by classroom routines such as dhuha prayer, recitation, hadith, and daily supplications. Memorisation was accompanied by movements using the Wafa technique. Children were also given opportunities to take leading roles in prayer activities. These practices connected verbal learning with modelling, bodily participation, and repeated experience rather than restricting Islamic education to a separate explanation.

The daily sequence linked religious routines with subsequent centre activities. This arrangement is important because it shows how the school interpreted its integrated Islamic identity in practice. Religious habituation was part of the organisation of the school day, while play and exploration remained visible components of learning. The study does not provide standardised assessments of religious understanding or establish that repetition alone produced internalised values. The finding is that teachers intentionally included religious routines within the same developmental programme.

Participant accounts associated these routines with discipline, responsibility, independence, and polite interaction. Parents described children becoming more accustomed to school rules and everyday expectations. Such statements suggest perceived continuity between school activities and children's conduct. Their interpretation requires care: parents were reporting developments they had noticed, and the study did not separate the influence of school routines from maturation or home experience. The evidence supports a description of educational practice and perceived development, rather than a causal attribution to one religious method.

Concrete Media and Responsive Classroom Assistance

Teachers used concrete teaching aids, educational games, visual materials, and objects from children's surroundings. They linked these resources to themes and encouraged active participation. Materials were selected to make learning more accessible and to give children direct experience of the concepts being discussed. The principal encouraged variation and the sharing of practices among teachers. Some accounts also referred to simple digital or visual media, but the study does not specify a particular technological intervention or measure its effectiveness.

A teacher explained the practical response to differences: "I use a more individual and differentiated approach according to children's needs, use simple and creative media from the surroundings, and arrange short, varied, enjoyable activities." The translated account connects the constraint with the adjustment made by the teacher.

Limited variety remained a constraint despite generally favourable descriptions of the learning environment. Teachers responded by making media from natural materials, used items, and readily available objects. Sharing ideas and resources with colleagues extended these possibilities. The principal described gradual procurement according to priorities. These findings distinguish the existence of basic facilities from the availability of sufficiently varied learning resources. A school can offer a safe and usable environment while still requiring investment in materials that support different activities and developmental needs.

Responsive assistance addressed children's uneven abilities and changing concentration. Teachers described using more individual approaches, modifying activities, and replacing unsuitable materials with practical alternatives. These adaptations were linked to maintaining participation, especially when children became distracted or needed additional explanation. The findings do not establish a prescribed duration for activities or a fixed level of individual support. Instead, teachers emphasised observing the immediate situation and making adjustments that allowed learning to continue.

Class size was discussed as a condition affecting this responsiveness. The principal and teachers explained that larger groups make it harder to observe each child, provide individual attention, and manage active activities. No numerical threshold or actual teacher-child ratio was supplied, so the study cannot identify an optimal group size. What it does show is the participants' recognition that differentiation depends on available adult attention. This places classroom organisation alongside teacher skill as a condition for implementing child-centred learning.

Continuous Assessment and Family Communication

Assessment was described as ongoing observation of children's learning and development, accompanied by reflection on teaching. Teachers used their observations to reconsider activities, assistance, and methods. The principal's account connected evaluation with supervision and programme review. Assessment therefore had two objects: children's participation and progress, and the suitability of the instructional approach. This distinction reduces the risk of interpreting every difficulty as a problem located exclusively in the child.

The school also communicated with parents through direct exchanges, meetings, and parenting activities. Teachers sought to align school routines with assistance at home. Parents

described receiving information about children's development and guidance on creating enjoyable learning conditions without undue pressure. They reported supporting simple activities, independence, discipline, and polite behaviour. These accounts show that the partnership concerned both learning content and everyday habits.

Continuity was nevertheless uneven. Teachers and school leaders identified inconsistent parental participation as a constraint. Some children required reinforcement at home that was not always available. The findings do not quantify the extent of uneven participation or identify its causes, so it would be inappropriate to attribute it to parental indifference. The relevant issue is that classroom strategies depended partly on communication and reinforcement beyond school, and this support could not be assumed to be uniform.

Enabling Conditions and Persistent Constraints

Leadership, professional development, staff commitment, parent support, and a conducive environment were repeatedly identified as enabling conditions. Teachers described training as a source of new methods, better classroom management, and opportunities for reflection. The principal connected supervision and mentoring with instructional improvement. These accounts suggest that teachers' classroom decisions were supported by a wider professional environment rather than being sustained only through individual initiative.

Table 2 summarises the relationship between the reported strategies, the constraints they addressed, and the support required for implementation. The table is an analytical synthesis of the qualitative findings; it is not a ranking of effectiveness. Its purpose is to show that each strategy depended on conditions that the institution and families helped to provide.

Table 2. Teaching strategies and source-grounded evidence

Strategy	Evidence in the case	Educational interpretation
Flexible planning	Initial observation; flexible daily plans; varied difficulty	Activities respond to interests, readiness and current support needs
Play and centres	Stories, singing, role play, projects, exploration and centres	Multiple routes to participation and direct experience
Islamic habituation	Dhuha prayer, recitation, supplication and teacher example	Religious learning embedded in recurring routines
Concrete media	Teaching aids, educational games, natural and used materials	Ideas related to familiar objects and active exploration
Assessment and reflection	Observation, developmental records, supervision and parent input	Teaching decisions reconsidered through participation evidence
Family communication	Meetings, parenting activities and direct exchanges	Opportunities to connect school aims with manageable home support

Note. The table synthesises reported and observed practices; it does not rank their effectiveness.

Table 3 links the implementation barriers with the responses described by participants.

Table 3. Constraints and adaptive responses

Constraint	Reported response
Limited variety of media	Create materials from available objects; share resources; procure gradually
Different developmental readiness	Adjust difficulty; use individual and small-group support
Changing attention	Shorten and vary activities; offer active and concrete experiences
Uneven family participation	Strengthen communication and parenting opportunities
Differences in teacher competence and time	Training, mentoring, supervision and collegial reflection

Note. Responses are practices described by participants, not independently evaluated interventions.

Constraints remained in media variety, differences in teacher competence, children's developmental variation, short attention spans, time for assistance and evaluation, and consistency of family participation. Participants generally considered support sufficient for the programme to continue, but this should not be interpreted as a measured comparison proving that supporting factors outweighed barriers. The stronger conclusion is that teachers and school leaders described practical ways of responding to difficulties while maintaining the programme.

Evaluation as a Shared Responsibility

The principal described supervision as direct observation of classroom learning, comparison of plans with implementation, and attention to children's involvement and responses. Developmental assessments, reflective discussion with teachers, and parent feedback were also used to inform follow-up. This account shows that supervision was connected with the educational process rather than limited to checking that a daily plan existed. Its focus included whether the intended activity was accessible to the children and what adjustments should follow.

Teachers described a corresponding classroom role. They observed involvement and recorded development across cognition, language, social and emotional learning, and motor activity. They also compared what had been planned with what actually occurred. Children's responses and parent comments supplied additional information for reflection. The evidence therefore identifies a shared evaluative orientation, although the study did not quantify how often each form of review was used or independently rate the quality of the resulting decisions.

The principal summarised this approach as "observing the learning process directly, assessing the match between planning and implementation, and looking at children's involvement and responses" (translated from Indonesian). This excerpt provides a specific link between leadership and classroom strategy. The principal's participation did not replace teacher judgement; it created an additional occasion for discussing whether that judgement was supported by the learning experience.

Differentiation Through Activity Difficulty and Grouping

The differentiation account also extended beyond giving individual encouragement. Teachers described varying the level of difficulty, combining individual and small-group approaches, and selecting stimuli and materials appropriate to current ability. More intensive assistance was provided where children needed additional help. These descriptions make the intended adjustment concrete: the same developmental purpose could be approached through different levels of demand and support.

The approach was also connected with innovation. Teachers described adapting simple projects, thematic educational games, interactive stories, role play, and exploration rather than reserving innovation for digital technology. Used materials and objects from the environment supplied resources for these activities. Their educational value depended on how teachers

organised participation and related the materials to the theme. This explains why creativity was discussed together with assessment and knowledge of the child.

Taken together, the accounts suggest that the teachers understood improvement as an iterative responsibility. Plans were prepared, enacted with adjustments, discussed through supervision and reflection, and reconsidered in relation to children's responses and family information. This pattern is the practical relationship summarised in Figure 1. It remains a qualitative account of the school's approach, not a measured estimate of the contribution of each component.

Discussion

Positioning Classroom Adaptation Within Research Evidence

The emphasis on responsive planning is consistent with research connecting play profiles and classroom assessment (Pyle et al., 2022). Its contribution here is the description of how observation is used alongside centres, group routines, and religious activities within one programme. The case does not identify a single optimal combination. It shows that teachers continually negotiate the relationship between intended learning, opportunities for child participation, and the support children need. This process perspective also makes sense of the apparently contradictory finding that facilities can be generally adequate while the variety of learning materials remains limited.

Professional learning should consequently be connected with the decisions teachers must make during activity. A brief professional-development trial examines responsivity and interaction quality (Brunsek et al., 2024), while a meta-analysis addresses in-service development specifically through teacher-child interactions (Egert et al., 2020). These studies strengthen the rationale for linking supervision with observable teaching practices. The present accounts add that training, sharing materials, and reflecting together were perceived as mutually supporting. They do not establish that attendance alone improved competence or that any reported training model was superior.

The organisational setting also matters. Novice teachers' accounts of professional development (Hooper et al., 2023) and providers' perceptions of practice-embedded coaching (Pfeiffer et al., 2022) direct attention to the usefulness of support, not only its availability. Research on curriculum fidelity relates teachers' perceptions to implementation (Clayback et al., 2023), while director and teacher accounts of a school-readiness programme examine institutional involvement (Hunter & Bierman, 2021). The Lubuklinggau case adds a local configuration in which the principal's supervision, staff collaboration, and gradual procurement created conditions for teachers' adaptation. The implication is to make professional support responsive to the classroom problems being discussed.

Relational Quality and Developmental Purposes

The programme's combination of learning and character routines can be situated within research on social and emotional education. Intervention mapping emphasises the deliberate design of aims and teaching practices (Blewitt, Morris, et al., 2020), while a review suggests that social and emotional programmes can support aspects of teaching quality but leaves some teacher outcomes uncertain (Blewitt, O'Connor, et al., 2020). Trials of social-skills training (Larose et al., 2020) and the I Can Succeed programme (Kats Gold et al., 2021) examine specific developmental outcomes under more controlled conditions. Their evidence supports purposeful educational design, while the present qualitative findings describe how teachers perceive and organise that purpose.

The distinction is important for assessment. Children's enthusiasm is evidence of engagement; it does not by itself establish growth across every developmental domain. A large teacher-implemented intervention addressing language and mathematics illustrates the kind of task-specific evaluation required for such claims (Bleses et al., 2020). Here, teachers' and parents' reports are valuable because they show the meanings attributed to the programme

and the continuity noticed across settings. Further outcome claims would require corresponding measures and a suitable design.

Indonesian research similarly links curriculum work with teacher interpretation and support. Studies of early childhood perceptions (Nuraeni et al., 2025), teacher adaptation (Marlina et al., 2024), and determinants of local-content implementation (Triasmanto & Dewi, 2019) identify related concerns in different settings. These comparisons locate the present findings within a wider implementation problem: educational aims require practical knowledge, usable resources, and continuing support. They also explain why the finding should not be reduced to a list of recommended methods. The case's contribution is the relationship between those methods and their enabling conditions.

Limitations and Directions for Development

The study was conducted in one kindergarten over a two-month period and involved nine adult informants. Its value lies in contextual depth and the comparison of professional and family perspectives. The findings cannot represent all integrated Islamic kindergartens or establish the long-term sustainability of the reported practices. The precise number of observed children and the frequency of observation were not specified, limiting the detail with which readers can assess coverage of classroom variation.

Future work could follow how planning, assistance, and family communication change over a longer period and examine whether children's participation is sustained across different centres. More explicit documentation of observation schedules, assessment criteria, and examples of differentiated activities would strengthen methodological transparency. These improvements would preserve the present study's focus on everyday practice while producing a clearer account of how strategies operate for different children and under different resource conditions.

CONCLUSION

Teachers at TK IT Mutiara Cendekia pursued learning quality through flexible planning, play and learning centres, differentiated assistance, concrete media, Islamic habituation, continuous assessment, and family communication. These practices operated as an interconnected process rather than independent techniques. Leadership, professional learning, staff collaboration, and a supportive environment helped teachers respond to limited media variety, changing attention, and developmental differences.

The principal practical implication is to connect observation and reflection with realistic decisions about activities, resources, and individual support. School-family communication should reinforce that process through manageable and reciprocal cooperation. The findings indicate favourable perceptions and observable features of participation, but they do not establish causal learning gains. Longer observation and clearer documentation of assessment would help determine how the reported approaches develop and remain sustainable.

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