

Ideological And Spiritual Predictors Of Teacher Commitment And Performance: Empirical Insights From Islamic Early Childhood Education In Indonesia

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Abstract: This study explores the influence of Ahmad Dahlan's educational and religious ideologies on kindergarten teachers' professional commitment and its subsequent effect on teaching performance. Focusing on 75 teachers selected from a population of 300 Aisyiyah kindergarten educators in Surakarta, Indonesia, this research employs a quantitative path analysis model. It examines two independent variables—Ahmad Dahlan's thought and religiosity—alongside one mediating variable (teacher commitment) and one dependent variable (teaching performance). Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed through inferential statistics. Findings demonstrate a significant path coefficient ($F = 28.567$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that the internalization of Dahlan's values meaningfully enhances teachers' dedication and instructional effectiveness. This study offers a unique contribution by integrating the spiritual-philosophical legacy of a local religious reformer into the discourse of teacher performance and professionalism. While rooted in the Indonesian Islamic education context, its insights hold relevance for Muslim-majority educational systems worldwide. By highlighting the transformative potential of spiritual motivation in teaching, the study expands the global dialogue on culturally grounded models of teacher development.

Keywords: Ahmad Dahlan, Dedication, Early Childhood, Education, Spirituality, Teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of early childhood education is increasingly recognized as a global imperative for ensuring long-term cognitive, social, and emotional development (Su & Yang, 2023). According to UNESCO, participation in early childhood education improves academic readiness and reduces inequality, especially in developing countries (Bati, 2022). Educators play a pivotal role not only in delivering academic instruction but in shaping children's values, identity, and ethical foundations. Consequently, the commitment and performance of early childhood teachers are crucial determinants of educational success, particularly in contexts where formative years shape lifelong learning trajectories.

In Indonesia, early childhood education is not only an academic concern but also a cultural and religious one—especially within Muhammadiyah-affiliated institutions such as Aisyiyah kindergartens (Xie & Li, 2020). These institutions combine Islamic values with national education standards, tasking teachers with dual responsibilities as pedagogical agents and moral exemplars. However, structural constraints persist, including inadequate salaries, high workloads, and limited institutional support (Tobin, 2020). Despite these challenges, many educators continue to demonstrate exceptional levels of commitment and performance—raising questions about the deeper motivational forces that sustain such dedication in faith-based settings.

KH Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of Muhammadiyah, is widely regarded as a reformist figure who emphasized the integration of Islamic spirituality, intellectual reasoning, and social engagement in education (Saputra et al., 2022). His thoughts on ethical leadership and the role of education as a means of societal transformation have shaped generations of Muslim educators. Yet, while his contributions are frequently celebrated in narrative and ideological terms, there is a striking absence of empirical studies

that examine how his philosophical legacy concretely influences teaching behavior, especially in early childhood education (Su & Yang, 2024). This gap limits our understanding of how local spiritual figures impact professional identity and performance in measurable ways.

To the best of our knowledge, no previous research has systematically investigated the relationship between KH Ahmad Dahlan's ideological thought, teacher religiosity, and performance outcomes, nor explored the mediating role of personal commitment in this dynamic (Saputra et al., 2025). This study addresses that gap by examining how Ahmad Dahlan's principles are internalized and operationalized by educators in the classroom (Luo et al., 2024). Through the application of path analysis, we assess both the direct and indirect effects of ideological and spiritual alignment on learning performance. In doing so, the study not only advances theoretical models of teacher motivation and leadership, but also offers contextually grounded insights that are urgently needed in today's era of educational transformation, including the implementation of Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka and post-pandemic pedagogical restructuring. By situating local wisdom within a rigorous empirical framework, this research contributes to a more pluralistic and culturally relevant understanding of educational professionalism in the Global South.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teacher Commitment and Learning Performance

Teacher commitment has long been acknowledged as a central predictor of educational quality and student success (Elstad et al., 2021). Defined as a psychological attachment to professional responsibilities, institutions, and learners, commitment influences a wide array of instructional behaviors, including lesson planning, classroom management, and student engagement. Studies by Jia and Derakhshan (2023) and Ahakwa (2024) suggest that committed teachers display higher persistence in the face of pedagogical challenges and are more effective in facilitating cognitive and affective learning outcomes. Commitment is also linked to teachers' willingness to adapt instructional strategies, contribute to institutional goals, and remain in the profession over time. However, most existing frameworks treat commitment as an isolated psychological construct, often overlooking its interaction with deeper ideological or spiritual motivators.

Religiosity and Teacher Motivation

Religiosity has emerged as a salient factor in shaping ethical behavior, workplace resilience, and professional satisfaction across various sectors, including education. In faith-based schools, religiosity often aligns with institutional missions, reinforcing a teacher's sense of purpose and responsibility. Gyeltshen (2021) observed that students with religious backgrounds performed better academically, largely due to the moral and structured environment fostered by religiously committed educators. Similarly, Yu et al. (2021) found that religiosity, when combined with transformational leadership, significantly enhanced teacher performance through Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). Despite these insights, religiosity is still frequently treated as a background variable rather than a central theoretical lens. There remains a lack of empirical exploration into how religiosity, especially when grounded in specific theological or ideological traditions, is internalized and expressed through professional behavior in educational settings.

KH Ahmad Dahlan's Educational Legacy

KH Ahmad Dahlan (1868–1923) is recognized as one of the most influential reformers in Indonesian Islamic education. He advocated for an integrative model of learning that fused religious teachings with scientific reasoning, civic responsibility, and moral development (Isdiyanto et al., 2022). As the founder of Muhammadiyah, his principles continue to underpin thousands of educational institutions across Indonesia. Ahmad Dahlan promoted what can be considered a form of progressive Islamic leadership—characterized by inclusivity, rationality, discipline, and commitment to social justice. However, while his legacy has been extensively documented in historical and philosophical studies (Khoirudin et al., 2020), its practical influence on contemporary teaching performance—particularly among early childhood educators—remains underexplored. This omission creates a disjunction between ideological reverence and

empirical validation, underscoring the need to investigate how his principles function in current classroom realities.

Integrating Ideology, Spirituality, and Performance: Research Positioning

Current models of teacher performance predominantly emphasize external support structures (e.g., school climate, remuneration, institutional policy) or internal cognitive factors (e.g., self-efficacy, job satisfaction). Very few studies incorporate ideological and spiritual dimensions as explanatory variables within formal analytical models. Furthermore, little attention has been given to the mediating mechanisms—such as self-commitment—through which these factors exert influence. The present study seeks to fill this gap by empirically testing a path model linking KH Ahmad Dahlan's ideological thought and teacher religiosity to learning performance, mediated by personal commitment. In doing so, it introduces a culturally grounded framework that contributes to the diversification of educational theory beyond Western-centric paradigms. It also responds to calls for more integrative models that reflect the complex realities of teaching in morally and spiritually charged environments, particularly in Islamic schooling systems.

METHOD

Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative explanatory research design to investigate causal relationships among key variables: Ahmad Dahlan's ideology and religiosity (independent variables), teacher commitment (mediating variable), and teaching performance (dependent variable). The study follows an *ex post facto* approach, focusing on naturally occurring data without experimental manipulation (Johnson, 2014). As a form of survey research, it collects data directly from the field and applies inferential statistical methods to test the proposed theoretical model.

Population and Sampling

The population comprised all Aisyiyah Kindergarten teachers in Surakarta City, totaling 300 individuals based on 2023 Dapodik records. A simple random sampling technique was applied proportionally across all sub-districts (Bauer et al., 2021). The sample size was calculated using the Slovin formula at a 10% margin of error, resulting in 75 respondents. This approach ensured that each member of the population had an equal opportunity to be selected.

Instrument and Data Collection

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire developed to measure four variables: Ahmad Dahlan's ideology, religiosity, teacher commitment, and teaching performance. Each construct was represented by multiple indicators and validated through expert judgment and a pilot study prior to full deployment. The instruments were distributed and collected in-person by trained enumerators (Mueller et al., 2020).

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis was conducted using path analysis, which allows the examination of both direct and indirect effects between variables. Prior to path analysis, standard classical assumption tests—including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity—were conducted to ensure the robustness of the model.

The path coefficients (β -values) were calculated to determine the strength and direction of the relationships. Indirect effects were derived by multiplying the relevant coefficients through the mediating pathway. A path diagram was constructed based on the hypothesized model to guide the structural interpretation.

To assess the explanatory power of the model, the coefficient of determination (R^2) was used. A higher R^2 value indicates stronger model fit and predictive ability regarding the dependent variable. All analyses were performed using appropriate statistical software for structural equation modeling with path analysis.

RESULTS

1. Classical Assumption Testing

a. Normality

The normality of residuals was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, histogram visualization, and normal probability plots. The test yielded a significance value of 0.729, which exceeds the α threshold of 0.05. Visual inspection confirmed that the residual distribution approximates normality, with data points clustering around the diagonal line on the P-P plot. Therefore, the data fulfill the assumption of normality.

b. Heteroscedasticity

Graphical inspection using a scatter plot of standardized residuals against predicted values revealed random dispersion without any apparent pattern, indicating no heteroscedasticity. This finding was confirmed by the Glejser test, where all independent variables recorded significance values above 0.05 (e.g., Ahmad Dahlan's ideology = 0.089; religiosity = 0.067; self-commitment = 0.075), thus satisfying the homoscedasticity assumption.

c. Multicollinearity

Multicollinearity was tested via Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) analysis. All independent variables recorded VIF values below the accepted threshold of 10 (e.g., VIF for religiosity = 1.563), indicating the absence of multicollinearity and confirming that the variables are sufficiently independent for path analysis.

2. Path Analysis

The study tested both partial and simultaneous relationships among the variables using path analysis. The results are presented in terms of both direct and mediated effects.

Table 1. Partial Effects (t-test)

Variable	Relationship	t-value	p-value	Significance
Ahmad Dahlan's Ideology	$X1 \rightarrow Y$	6.031	0.000	Significant
Religiosity	$X2 \rightarrow Y$	8.393	0.000	Significant
Self-Commitment	$Z \rightarrow Y$	4.817	0.001	Significant

All independent and intervening variables showed statistically significant direct effects on teaching performance (Y), indicating that both ideological and spiritual factors, as well as teacher commitment, play important roles in shaping instructional outcomes.

Table 2. Simultaneous Effects (F-test)

Model	Model Structure	F-value	p-value	Significance
Model 1	$X1 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	66.328	0.000	Significant
Model 2	$X2 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	17.385	0.000	Significant
Model 3	$X1, X2 \rightarrow Z \rightarrow Y$	5.424	0.047	Significant
Model 4	$X1, X2 \rightarrow Y$	28.567	0.000	Significant

These findings validate the proposed model, confirming that Ahmad Dahlan's ideological thought and religiosity both have a significant and combined impact on teachers' learning performance, either directly or through the mediating effect of professional commitment.

3. Model Fit and Predictive Power

The adjusted R^2 value of the model was calculated at 0.488, indicating that approximately 48.8% of the variance in teaching performance is explained by the independent and mediating variables (Ahmad Dahlan's ideology, religiosity, and commitment). The remaining 51.2% is attributed to other external factors not captured in the present model.

This study offers empirical validation of a culturally grounded theoretical framework, demonstrating that spiritual and ideological dimensions—particularly those inspired by Ahmad Dahlan's educational philosophy—have a measurable and meaningful impact on teacher performance in Islamic early childhood institutions. The inclusion of self-commitment as a mediating factor further enriches the model,

underscoring the role of intrinsic dedication in enhancing educational outcomes. These findings not only align with prior theoretical expectations but also offer practical implications for teacher development programs in Muslim-majority societies and beyond.

DISCUSSION

This study offers empirical support for the assertion that ideological and spiritual foundations—particularly those derived from KH Ahmad Dahlan’s legacy—significantly enhance teachers’ professional commitment and teaching performance (Saputra et al., 2021). Through a robust path analysis framework, the findings confirm that both ideology and religiosity serve as powerful internal motivators that operate not only directly but also through the mediating effect of self-commitment (Peng et al., 2023). These insights enrich the discourse on teacher effectiveness by integrating culturally grounded variables often overlooked in global educational theory.

The present findings align with and extend prior research on teacher commitment. Elstad et al. (2021) underscore commitment as a predictor of instructional quality and student achievement, while Cramer et al. (2023) emphasize its influence on teachers’ persistence in the face of pedagogical challenges. Our findings confirm these assertions but add a novel layer: commitment does not emerge in a vacuum. Instead, it is shaped by deeper ideological beliefs and spiritual orientations (Amzat et al., 2023). While previous models have treated commitment as an isolated psychological trait, our study shows that it is, in fact, a conduit through which values and belief systems translate into effective classroom behavior.

Consistent with studies by Alzoraiki et al. (2023) and Sullanmaa et al. (2024), this research validates religiosity as a potent internal driver of teacher motivation and effectiveness. However, unlike these studies—which view religiosity as a contextual enhancer—our approach positions it as a core structural variable within a theoretical model. Rather than being a passive background factor, religiosity in this study is actively internalized by teachers and expressed through heightened commitment and learning performance (Khan et al., 2020). This reconceptualization allows for a deeper understanding of how faith-informed educators engage with their responsibilities—not merely as professionals, but as moral agents.

The strong influence of Ahmad Dahlan’s ideology offers fresh empirical validation of a historically celebrated figure in Indonesian Islamic education. While his contributions have been well-documented philosophically, the translation of his values into measurable teacher behavior has remained largely unexplored (Fenech et al., 2022). Our study addresses this gap by showing how principles such as rationality, justice, and moral leadership—championed by Dahlan—continue to shape teacher conduct in modern Islamic schooling systems. This illustrates how historical thought can remain pedagogically alive when embedded in teachers’ lived commitments.

This study departs from dominant models of teacher performance that focus on extrinsic factors such as institutional support or financial incentives. By centering ideological and spiritual dimensions, the study offers a culturally nuanced model that is more attuned to the social and moral realities of Islamic educators (Han, 2022). As highlighted by Isdiyanto et al. (2022), Dahlan’s integrative approach fuses religion, science, and civic responsibility—a synthesis that this research operationalizes into a quantifiable and statistically robust framework. In doing so, it challenges the universality of Western-centric paradigms and advocates for context-sensitive educational models.

An important contribution of this study lies in the identification of self-commitment as a mediating mechanism. Teachers who internalize ideological and spiritual frameworks exhibit stronger perseverance, adaptability, and professional engagement—characteristics long associated with effective teaching (Ahakwa, 2024). This confirms the value of examining mediated pathways rather than relying solely on direct variable associations. It also resonates with findings by Leijen et al. (2022), who emphasized that emotional dedication and moral responsibility are among the strongest predictors of teaching success.

While many reformist ideals are often celebrated abstractly, our findings suggest that Ahmad Dahlan’s vision can be empirically operationalized. His emphasis on discipline, inclusivity, and service continues to shape professional conduct in faith-based educational settings. These results resonate with the call by Hammad et al. (2024) to reframe educators as peacebuilders and moral exemplars. Teachers who embody

Dahlan's vision not only fulfill academic duties but also nurture a culture of empathy, justice, and intellectual openness—qualities essential for 21st-century learners (Werang et al., 2023).

These findings hold deep practical implications. First, teacher training programs—especially in faith-based contexts—should incorporate ideological literacy and spiritual formation as essential components of professional development. Second, educational leaders might consider how institutional cultures can support the internalization of shared values, thereby reinforcing intrinsic motivation. From a theoretical perspective, this research supports the expansion of teacher performance models to include non-material, values-based dimensions. It invites scholars to move beyond behavioral and cognitive lenses to embrace moral, spiritual, and cultural paradigms in education.

This study, while robust in design, acknowledges its contextual boundaries. Conducted in a specific educational setting in Surakarta, the generalizability of results may be limited. Future research should explore similar models across different regions and levels of schooling. Additionally, employing longitudinal designs or qualitative complements could provide deeper insight into how ideological internalization develops over time. Investigating other mediators—such as emotional resilience or institutional climate—would further refine our understanding of performance pathways.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that KH Ahmad Dahlan's ideological values and religiosity significantly influence teachers' commitment and learning performance, both directly and through a mediating effect. The findings highlight that personal belief systems—rooted in spiritual and reformist traditions—play a foundational role in shaping professional behavior, particularly in faith-based educational settings. By demonstrating that ideological and religious orientations foster stronger teacher commitment, this study introduces a culturally grounded framework that advances educational theory beyond the limits of conventional, secular models.

Practically, these insights call for a reorientation of teacher development programs toward values integration and ideological literacy, especially in Muslim-majority contexts. Embedding spiritual and ethical leadership principles into training models can enhance teacher performance not only cognitively but also morally and affectively. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on teacher effectiveness by asserting that deeply held convictions—not just institutional support—are essential to sustaining dedication and educational excellence.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors express their sincere gratitude to Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta for the institutional support and academic resources provided throughout the completion of this research.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article.

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