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Emotional Intelligence and Curriculum Management Practices among Raudhatul Athfal Principals Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Serang City

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the association between Raudhatul Athfal principals' emotional intelligence and Merdeka Curriculum management practices in Islamic early childhood education institutions. Emotional intelligence is examined as a leadership characteristic that may support curriculum management activities, including planning, organizing, implementation, and monitoring. This study employed a non-experimental quantitative approach with an explanatory correlational design. Data were collected through theory-based four-point Likert questionnaires involving 39 Raudhatul Athfal principals in Serang City, Banten, whose institutions had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, instrument quality testing, regression assumption testing, correlation analysis, and simple linear regression using SPSS 26. The findings indicate a strong positive association between principals' emotional intelligence scores and curriculum-management practices scores. The statistical model showed a statistically significant association between the two variables; however, the findings should be interpreted as a statistical association within the observed sample rather than evidence of causal effects. The study contributes contextual empirical evidence regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and curriculum management practices among Raudhatul Athfal principals implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Practically, the findings suggest that leadership development programs may integrate curriculum-management competence with reflective leadership, emotional regulation, communication, and collaborative supervision.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence; Curriculum Management Practices; Merdeka Curriculum; Raudhatul Athfal; Educational Leadership*

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education represents a foundational stage in human development, as experiences during this period influence children's cognitive, social-emotional, moral, language, and independence development. The quality of early childhood education services is shaped not only by classroom interactions but also by the capacity of educational institutions to manage curriculum, educators, learning environments, partnerships with families, and continuous evaluation processes. Consequently, ensuring quality early childhood education requires not only effective classroom practices but also institutional leadership capable of coordinating educational resources and supporting continuous improvement. Although early childhood education emphasizes flexibility and child-centered learning, effective implementation requires systematic planning, coordination, and assessment to ensure that institutional practices remain aligned with children's developmental needs (Fadillah & Yusuf, 2022; Jannah & Harun, 2023; Nursalam et al., 2023). Therefore, institutional leaders are positioned as key actors in translating educational policies into meaningful practices by providing direction, coordinating resources, supporting teachers, and maintaining organizational coherence. International research on prekindergarten and kindergarten leadership further indicates that early childhood leaders require instructional vision, teacher-capacity development, community responsiveness, and organizational support to sustain educational quality (Brown et al., 2024).

Within this broader leadership context, the responsibilities of early childhood education leaders have become increasingly significant following the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. As a curriculum reform initiative, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes learning flexibility, meaningful and contextual learning experiences, character development, and greater professional autonomy for educators in designing learning processes (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024; Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025, 2026). In early childhood education settings, these principles require institutions to adjust curriculum documents, develop project-based learning activities, strengthen assessment practices, coordinate internal implementation processes, and maintain communication with parents and other stakeholders (Cahyaningrum & Diana, 2023; Hukamak et al., 2023; Nofitasari et al., 2023). Consequently, curriculum reform requires institutional leaders who can translate policy expectations into practices that are responsive to institutional conditions and educational needs.

The successful implementation of curriculum flexibility depends on more than policy understanding alone. Previous studies indicate that curriculum adaptation in early childhood education is influenced by teacher readiness, professional development opportunities, institutional resources, and the ability of educational leaders to translate curriculum policies into practices that are relevant to local conditions (Anggraeni, 2022; Mursid et al., 2026). These conditions highlight the need for leadership approaches that support coordination, teacher development, and adaptive responses during curriculum implementation.

Despite the flexibility offered by the Merdeka Curriculum, its implementation does not automatically result in consistent practices across early childhood education institutions. Previous studies have identified several challenges, including variations in teachers' understanding of curriculum principles, limited access to professional development, resistance to change, technological and facility limitations, and differences in parental participation

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(Cahya et al., 2025; Musa et al., 2022; Tupalessy, 2024). These challenges indicate that curriculum implementation is not solely a technical or administrative process but also involves interpersonal coordination and organizational adaptation.

In this situation, early childhood education leaders are required to manage change through continuous communication, collaborative decision-making, and support for teachers who experience difficulties during implementation. Leaders must interpret policy expectations, respond to diverse stakeholder perspectives, and maintain institutional commitment while curriculum practices are being adjusted. Research on early childhood leadership highlights that successful educational change requires leadership support, interconnected resources, and sensitivity to educators' needs throughout the implementation process (Ackah-Jnr & Fluckiger, 2023). Therefore, curriculum reform requires leadership capacities that extend beyond formal managerial competence and include relational abilities that facilitate collaboration and adaptation.

The relational demands associated with curriculum reform highlight emotional intelligence as a leadership characteristic that may contribute to understanding educational management processes. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize and regulate personal emotions, maintain motivation, understand others' perspectives, and develop constructive social relationships (Goleman, 1998). Within educational organizations, these abilities are relevant because leaders frequently engage in communication, decision-making, conflict management, and collaboration with multiple stakeholders.

Previous studies have provided empirical evidence regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and educational leadership outcomes. A systematic review by Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) demonstrated that emotional intelligence is associated with leadership effectiveness among school leaders. Further studies have indicated that leaders' emotional intelligence is related to trust development, teacher performance, and organizational citizenship behavior through interpersonal processes (Lee et al., 2023; Hsieh et al., 2024). Research by Venter et al. (2024) also suggests that emotional intelligence is associated with instructional leadership practices among school principals. These findings indicate that emotional intelligence represents a relevant leadership characteristic for understanding how educational leaders manage relationships and organizational demands.

However, existing studies have predominantly examined emotional intelligence among leaders in primary, secondary, or higher education contexts (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022; Venter et al., 2024). Evidence regarding emotional intelligence among leaders of Islamic early childhood education institutions, particularly Raudhatul Athfal principals responsible for implementing curriculum reform, remains limited. Therefore, examining emotional intelligence within the context of Raudhatul Athfal provides an opportunity to extend existing leadership research into an early childhood education setting characterized by close collaboration among principals, teachers, families, and communities.

Although research on emotional intelligence and curriculum implementation has developed considerably, these two strands of research remain underexplored when examined together within early childhood education settings. Previous studies on the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education have primarily examined curriculum readiness, teacher perceptions, implementation processes, project-based learning, learning committees, and institutional challenges (Munawar, 2022; Fadillah & Yusuf, 2022; Jannah & Harun, 2023; Cahyaningrum & Diana, 2023; Hukamak et al., 2023; Nursalam et al., 2023; Mursid et al., 2026). These studies

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have contributed valuable knowledge regarding how early childhood institutions adapt to curriculum reform; however, quantitative evidence regarding leadership characteristics associated with curriculum-management practices remains limited.

Similarly, studies examining emotional intelligence in educational leadership have demonstrated its relevance for leadership effectiveness, organizational relationships, and teacher-related outcomes (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2023; Hsieh et al., 2024; Venter et al., 2024). Nevertheless, most existing evidence has focused on educational leaders outside the Islamic early childhood education context. Recent research has examined the relationship between early childhood principals' leadership and children's social-emotional development (Hariyanti et al., 2026), but it has not specifically examined whether principals' emotional intelligence is associated with the management functions required for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

This limitation reflects both an empirical and contextual gap. Empirically, quantitative studies examining the association between principals' emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices in early childhood education remain limited. Contextually, Raudhatul Athfal represents a distinctive educational setting where principals coordinate curriculum implementation through relationships involving teachers, parents, foundations, supervisors, and local communities. Therefore, investigating emotional intelligence among Raudhatul Athfal principals provides contextual evidence regarding leadership characteristics associated with curriculum implementation during educational reform.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the association between Raudhatul Athfal principals' emotional intelligence and Merdeka Curriculum management practices in Serang City. Specifically, this study investigates whether principals' composite emotional intelligence scores are statistically associated with curriculum-management practices involving planning, organizing, implementation, and monitoring functions. Based on these conceptual considerations, the study hypothesizes that higher emotional intelligence scores are positively associated with higher curriculum-management scores among participating Raudhatul Athfal principals.

This study contributes contextual quantitative evidence to the intersection of emotional intelligence, educational leadership, and curriculum implementation research within Islamic early childhood education. Rather than proposing emotional intelligence as a sole determinant of curriculum-management quality, this study examines its statistical association with management practices in a specific educational setting where principals are directly involved in implementing curriculum reform. The findings may contribute to discussions on leadership development programs that integrate curriculum-management competence with reflective leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills.

METHODS

This study employed a non-experimental quantitative approach using an explanatory correlational design with cross-sectional survey data collection. A correlational design was selected because the study aimed to examine the statistical association between emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices without manipulating variables or establishing causal effects (Creswell & Guetterman, 2025). Therefore, the findings are interpreted as evidence of statistical association within the observed sample rather than as evidence of causal influence.

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The study was conducted among Raudhatul Athfal institutions in Serang City, Banten. The initial population consisted of 89 Raudhatul Athfal principals. Participants were identified based on predefined eligibility criteria: (1) currently serving as Raudhatul Athfal principals in Serang City, (2) leading institutions that had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, and (3) providing complete questionnaire responses. Based on these criteria, 39 principals constituted the final analytic dataset. Therefore, the participants represented eligible participating cases within the study setting rather than a probability sample intended to represent all Raudhatul Athfal principals in Indonesia.

An a priori statistical power calculation was not included in the sampling procedure. Consequently, the sample size is acknowledged as a limitation regarding statistical precision and the extent to which findings may be generalized beyond the observed setting. Data were collected using structured self-report questionnaires consisting of two instruments: emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices. The instruments were developed through theory-based operationalization of established concepts rather than direct reproduction of a single standardized scale. Emotional intelligence dimensions were developed based on Goleman's (1998) conceptualization, which includes self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, self-motivation, and social skills. Meanwhile, curriculum-management dimensions were developed based on educational management functions involving planning, organizing, implementation, and monitoring (Siregar & Mashudi, 2024).

The emotional intelligence instrument consisted of 33 items measuring five dimensions: self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, self-motivation, and social skills. The curriculum-management instrument consisted of 30 items measuring four dimensions: planning, organizing, implementation, and monitoring. All items were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Higher scores represented stronger levels of perceived emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices.

The research variables were operationalized based on their respective theoretical dimensions and measurement indicators. Table 1 presents the dimensions, example items, number of items, and response scale used to measure emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices.

Table 1. Operationalization of Research Variables

Variable	Dimension	Example Item	Items	Scale
Emotional Intelligence (X)	Self-awareness	I understand my emotional responses when performing leadership responsibilities	7	4-point Likert
	Emotional regulation	I remain calm when dealing with difficulties during curriculum implementation	7	4-point Likert
	Empathy	I consider teachers' perspectives before making curriculum-related decisions	6	4-point Likert
	Self-motivation	I maintain motivation when achieving curriculum implementation objectives	6	4-point Likert
	Social skills	I communicate effectively with teachers and stakeholders during curriculum implementation	7	4-point Likert

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Variable	Dimension	Example Item	Items	Scale
Curriculum Management Practices (Y)	Planning	I prepare curriculum implementation plans based on institutional needs	8	4-point Likert
	Organizing	I coordinate teacher responsibilities in curriculum implementation activities	7	4-point Likert
	Implementation	I ensure that planned curriculum activities are implemented effectively	8	4-point Likert
	Monitoring	I conduct evaluations to improve curriculum implementation practices	7	4-point Likert

Each item was measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The emotional intelligence instrument consisted of 33 items covering five dimensions, while the curriculum-management practices instrument consisted of 30 items covering four dimensions. Higher scores indicated stronger levels of perceived emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices.

The instruments underwent item quality evaluation before hypothesis testing. Content specification was established through theoretical alignment between dimensions and indicators derived from relevant conceptual frameworks. Item validity was assessed using corrected item-total correlations, with items exceeding the predetermined reference value retained for analysis.

However, the available study documentation does not include a separate expert-panel content validity index or factor-analytic construct validation. Therefore, the validity evidence presented in this study should be interpreted as evidence of theoretical alignment and internal item consistency rather than comprehensive construct validation.

Internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Although both instruments demonstrated high reliability coefficients, these results are interpreted cautiously because very high internal consistency may also indicate conceptual similarity among items measuring related dimensions.

A separate pilot study was not conducted. Instead, instrument quality was evaluated through item validity and reliability analysis using the collected dataset.

Data collection was conducted through a structured questionnaire administered to eligible Raudhatul Athfal principals in Serang City. Before data collection, participants were identified based on the predetermined eligibility criteria, including their status as active Raudhatul Athfal principals, institutional implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and completeness of questionnaire responses. The researchers provided information regarding the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of participation before questionnaire completion.

The questionnaire was distributed using a structured format containing emotional intelligence and curriculum-management items. Participants responded to each item using a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. After the questionnaires were returned, the responses were screened to ensure completeness and eligibility for analysis. Only complete questionnaire responses were included in the final dataset, resulting in 39 valid responses for statistical analysis.

A separate pilot study was not conducted. Instead, instrument quality was evaluated through item validity and reliability analysis using the collected dataset. The completed dataset

was subsequently analyzed using descriptive statistics, validity and reliability testing, regression assumption testing, and hypothesis testing procedures.

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26 through several sequential stages. First, descriptive statistics were performed to summarize the characteristics and distribution of emotional intelligence and curriculum-management scores. Second, item validity and internal consistency reliability analyses were conducted to evaluate the quality of the research instruments. Item validity was assessed using corrected item-total correlations, while reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficients.

Third, regression assumption testing was conducted before hypothesis testing. Residual normality was examined using the Normal Probability–Probability (P–P) Plot, while heteroscedasticity was evaluated using the Glejser test. These procedures were conducted to determine whether the data met the assumptions required for linear regression analysis (Field, 2018).

Fourth, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the direction and strength of the association between emotional intelligence and curriculum-management scores. Simple linear regression analysis was subsequently performed to examine the statistical contribution of emotional intelligence to curriculum-management scores. The regression model was specified as:

$$Y = a + bX + e$$

where Y represents curriculum-management scores, X represents the composite emotional intelligence score, a represents the constant value, b represents the regression coefficient, and e represents the error term.

The significance of the regression coefficient was evaluated using the t-test, while overall model significance was examined using the F-test at $\alpha = 0.05$. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was interpreted as the proportion of variance in curriculum-management practices scores statistically associated with emotional intelligence scores within the observed sample.

Because both variables were measured through self-report questionnaires completed by the same respondents at the same time, common method variance cannot be fully eliminated. This limitation was considered when interpreting the strength of observed associations (Podsakoff et al., 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics were conducted to summarize the distribution of emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices scores among Raudhatul Athfal principals participating in the study. The analysis included the number of respondents, minimum and maximum scores, mean values, and standard deviations for each research variable.

A total of 39 fully completed questionnaires were included in the analysis. The emotional intelligence instrument consisted of 33 items scored from 1 to 4, resulting in a theoretical score range from 33 to 132. The observed emotional intelligence scores ranged from 77 to 132, with a mean score of 95.54 (SD = 12.00). The mean score was above the theoretical midpoint of 82.50, indicating that respondents generally reported positive perceptions regarding their self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, self-motivation, and social skills in leadership

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practices. However, this interpretation remains descriptive because the study did not establish external classification criteria for categorizing emotional intelligence levels.

The curriculum-management practices instrument consisted of 30 items with a theoretical score range from 30 to 120. The observed scores ranged from 64 to 120, with a mean score of 85.28 (SD = 11.56). The mean score exceeded the theoretical midpoint of 75.00, suggesting that participating principals generally reported the implementation of curriculum-management practices related to planning, organizing, implementation, and monitoring. Nevertheless, the variation in scores indicates differences among principals regarding the extent to which these practices were reported within their institutions.

Overall, both variables demonstrated comparable distribution patterns, with mean scores exceeding their respective theoretical midpoints and considerable variation among respondents. The mean item score for emotional intelligence (2.90) was slightly higher than the mean item score for curriculum-management practices (2.84). However, these values should not be interpreted as a direct comparison because the two constructs represent different theoretical dimensions measured through different item contents. Descriptive analysis was conducted to provide an overview of the distribution characteristics of the research variables. Table 2 presents the number of respondents, minimum and maximum scores, mean values, and standard deviations for emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Emotional Intelligence	39	77.00	132.00	95.54	12.00
Curriculum-Management Practices	39	64.00	120.00	85.28	11.56

Instrument quality testing was conducted to evaluate item consistency and internal reliability before performing the regression analysis. Because a separate pilot study was not conducted, instrument evaluation was performed using the collected dataset through corrected item-total correlation analysis and Cronbach's alpha reliability testing.

Item validity was assessed using corrected item-total correlations with a reference value of 0.316. All items from both instruments exceeded this criterion and were retained for subsequent analysis. The emotional intelligence instrument showed corrected item-total correlations ranging from 0.363 to 0.741, while the curriculum-management practices instrument showed correlations ranging from 0.470 to 0.796. These findings indicate that each item demonstrated a positive relationship with its respective total construct score and contributed to measuring the intended variables.

Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The emotional intelligence instrument obtained an alpha coefficient of 0.946, while the curriculum-management practices instrument obtained an alpha coefficient of 0.952. These coefficients indicate high internal consistency among items within each instrument and support the use of composite scores for subsequent statistical analysis.

However, the very high alpha coefficients should be interpreted cautiously because high internal consistency values may also indicate conceptual similarity or redundancy among items. Therefore, although the instruments demonstrated acceptable reliability within the present sample, further instrument development using factor analysis would be beneficial to examine

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whether the proposed dimensions are empirically distinguishable and whether item reduction could maintain adequate construct representation.

The quality of the research instruments was evaluated through corrected item-total correlation analysis and Cronbach's alpha reliability testing. Table 3 summarizes the number of items, item-total correlation ranges, reliability coefficients, and decisions regarding the quality of each instrument.

Table 3. Summary of Instrument Validity and Reliability

Instrument	Number of Items	Corrected Item-Total Correlation Range	Cronbach's Alpha	Decision
Emotional Intelligence	33	0.363–0.741	0.946	Valid and reliable
Curriculum-Management Practices	30	0.470–0.796	0.952	Valid and reliable

Before conducting simple linear regression analysis, regression assumption testing was performed to evaluate whether the data met the requirements for regression estimation. The assumptions examined in this study included residual normality and heteroscedasticity.

Residual normality was evaluated using the Normal Probability–Probability (P–P) Plot. The residual points were generally distributed around the diagonal line, indicating that the residual distribution was approximately consistent with normality assumptions for regression analysis. This diagnostic does not demonstrate perfect normality but indicates that no substantial deviation was observed based on the available residual plot (Field, 2018).

Heteroscedasticity was assessed using the Glejser test. The test produced a significance value of $p = 0.555$ for emotional intelligence. Because this value exceeded the significance level of 0.05, the analysis did not provide statistical evidence of heteroscedasticity in the regression residuals. Therefore, the residual variance was considered sufficiently consistent for conducting the subsequent regression analysis.

Additional regression diagnostics showed a standard error of the estimate of 3.895, which was lower than the observed standard deviation of curriculum-management practices scores (11.56). This indicates that the average distance between observed curriculum-management practices scores and regression-estimated values was approximately 3.9 points within the observed sample. However, this value should be interpreted as a measure of model estimation error rather than an indication of individual-level prediction accuracy.

The Durbin–Watson value was 2.664 and was examined as an additional residual diagnostic. Because the study used cross-sectional data collected from different Raudhatul Athfal principals rather than time-series observations, this statistic was interpreted cautiously. Overall, the available diagnostic results did not indicate major assumption violations that would prevent the application of simple linear regression analysis. Regression assumption testing was conducted to evaluate whether the data met the requirements for simple linear regression analysis. Table 4 summarizes the diagnostic results, including residual normality, heteroscedasticity testing, standard error of estimate, and Durbin–Watson statistics.

Table 4. Regression Assumption Testing

Test	Result	Interpretation
Residual Normality (Normal P–P Plot)	Residual points generally followed diagonal line	Approximate normal distribution of residuals
Glejser Test	p = 0.555	No statistical evidence of heteroscedasticity
Standard Error of Estimate	3.895	Average regression estimation error within observed sample
Durbin–Watson	2.664	Additional residual diagnostic for model assessment

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the statistical association between emotional intelligence scores and curriculum-management practices scores among Raudhatul Athfal principals. Pearson correlation analysis was initially performed to examine the direction and strength of the relationship between the two variables before estimating the regression model.

The correlation analysis showed a strong positive association between emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices ($r = 0.943$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that higher emotional intelligence scores were observed together with higher curriculum-management practices scores within the participating sample. However, because the data were collected using a cross-sectional self-report design, this relationship should be interpreted as a statistical association rather than evidence of causal influence.

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the statistical association between emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices among Raudhatul Athfal principals. Pearson correlation analysis was first conducted to identify the direction and strength of the association between the two variables.

The correlation analysis showed a strong positive association between emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices ($r = 0.943$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that principals who reported higher emotional intelligence scores also tended to report higher curriculum-management practices scores. However, because the study employed a cross-sectional and non-experimental design, this association should be interpreted as a statistical relationship rather than evidence of causal influence.

The regression model demonstrated a statistically significant overall fit. The ANOVA test indicated that the regression model significantly explained variation in curriculum-management practices scores, with $F(1,37) = 297.483$ and $p < 0.001$. This result indicates that the one-predictor regression model provided a statistically meaningful explanation of the observed association between emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices within the studied sample.

The model summary showed an R value of 0.943 and an R Square value of 0.889, indicating that 88.9% of the observed variance in curriculum-management practices scores was statistically associated with the emotional intelligence composite score in the specified regression model. The adjusted R Square value of 0.886 showed that the estimated association remained relatively stable after considering model parameters. However, the magnitude of this value should be interpreted cautiously because both variables were measured through self-

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report questionnaires from the same respondents, which may increase the possibility of common method variance.

The regression equation was specified as:

$$Y = -1{,}480 + 0.908X$$

Where Y represents curriculum-management practices scores and X represents emotional intelligence scores. The regression coefficient for emotional intelligence was positive and statistically significant (B = 0.908, SE = 0.053, β = 0.943, t = 17.248, p < 0.001). This result indicates that higher emotional intelligence scores were statistically associated with higher curriculum-management practices scores among participating Raudhatul Athfal principals.

Although the regression coefficient and model significance indicate a strong statistical association, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that emotional intelligence alone determines curriculum-management practices. The high R^2 value should be considered alongside the possibility of conceptual overlap between constructs, positive self-report tendencies, and common method variance. Therefore, the findings provide evidence of association within the observed sample rather than a causal explanation of curriculum-management practices.

The regression coefficient analysis was conducted to examine the contribution of emotional intelligence as a predictor variable in the simple linear regression model. Table 5 presents the unstandardized coefficient (B), standard error, standardized coefficient (β), t-value, and significance level for the emotional intelligence variable in relation to curriculum-management practices.

Table 5. Simple Linear Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B	Standard Error	Beta	t	p
Constant	-1.480	5.069	-	-0.292	0.772
Emotional Intelligence	0.908	0.053	0.943	17.248	<0.001

In addition to examining individual regression coefficients, the overall significance of the regression model was evaluated using the analysis of variance (ANOVA) test. Table 6 presents the regression model summary, including the partition of variance, degrees of freedom, mean square values, F-statistic, and significance level.

Table 6. ANOVA for the Simple Linear Regression Model

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	4512.630	1	4512.630	297.483	<0.001
Residual	561.267	37	15.169	-	-
Total	5073.897	38	-	-	-

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DISCUSSION

Association between Emotional Intelligence and Curriculum Management Practices

The present study examined the statistical association between Raudhatul Athfal principals' emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices within the implementation context of the Merdeka Curriculum in Serang City. The findings demonstrated a strong positive association between emotional intelligence scores and curriculum-management practices scores. The significant regression model indicates that emotional intelligence was statistically associated with variation in curriculum-management practices among participating principals. However, these findings should be interpreted as evidence of association within the observed sample rather than evidence that emotional intelligence directly causes stronger curriculum-management practices.

The finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the relevance of emotional intelligence in educational leadership contexts. Goleman (1998) conceptualized emotional intelligence as consisting of self-awareness, emotional regulation, self-motivation, empathy, and social skills, which represent personal and interpersonal capacities relevant to leadership processes. In educational organizations, these capacities may support leaders in managing communication, maintaining professional relationships, and responding to organizational demands. Gómez-Leal et al. (2022), through a systematic review of emotional intelligence and leadership research, demonstrated that emotional intelligence is associated with leadership effectiveness across educational settings. Similarly, Lee et al. (2023) and Hsieh et al. (2024) reported associations between leaders' emotional intelligence and interpersonal organizational outcomes, including trust development and teacher-related behaviors. Venter et al. (2024) further indicated that emotional intelligence is related to instructional leadership practices among school principals.

The relationship identified in this study can be interpreted through the relational characteristics of curriculum implementation. The Merdeka Curriculum requires educational leaders to coordinate curriculum planning, support teachers' adaptation processes, communicate institutional expectations, and maintain collaboration with multiple stakeholders (Cahyaningrum & Diana, 2023; Hukamak et al., 2023; Nursalam et al., 2023). These processes involve interpersonal interactions that correspond with several dimensions of emotional intelligence, particularly empathy, emotional regulation, and social skills (Goleman, 1998). Therefore, principals who report stronger emotional intelligence characteristics may also report stronger curriculum-management practices because both constructs involve elements of communication, coordination, and relationship management. Nevertheless, this interpretation represents a conceptual explanation of the observed statistical relationship and should not be understood as evidence of a direct causal pathway.

Emotional Intelligence within the Context of Raudhatul Athfal Leadership

The findings extend previous emotional intelligence and educational leadership research by providing evidence from the context of Raudhatul Athfal, an Islamic early childhood education setting. Previous studies on emotional intelligence have predominantly focused on school leaders in primary, secondary, or higher education contexts (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022; Venter et al., 2024). Consequently, limited empirical evidence has examined how emotional

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intelligence relates to curriculum-management practices among early childhood education leaders, particularly within Islamic early childhood institutions.

The specific characteristics of Raudhatul Athfal leadership provide an important contextual perspective for interpreting the findings. Unlike administrative leadership that primarily focuses on organizational procedures, early childhood leaders frequently operate within close relational networks involving teachers, children's families, foundations, and local communities. Brown et al. (2024) emphasized that effective early childhood leaders require instructional vision, teacher-capacity development, community responsiveness, and organizational support. Similarly, Ackah-Jnr and Fluckiger (2023) highlighted that leadership in early childhood education requires sensitivity to educators' needs and organizational conditions during educational change processes.

Within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, these relational demands become increasingly relevant because curriculum reform requires continuous communication, collaboration, and adaptation among institutional members. Previous studies have shown that early childhood curriculum implementation is influenced by teacher readiness, institutional support, professional development, and local adaptation processes (Fadillah & Yusuf, 2022; Jannah & Harun, 2023; Munawar, 2022; Mursid et al., 2026). Therefore, the association between emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices identified in this study may reflect the importance of interpersonal leadership capacities in supporting curriculum-related organizational processes.

Theoretical and Practical Contributions

The findings contribute to the intersection between emotional intelligence research, educational leadership, and curriculum implementation studies by providing contextual quantitative evidence from Raudhatul Athfal principals. Previous studies regarding the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education have primarily focused on curriculum readiness, teacher perceptions, implementation processes, project-based learning, and institutional challenges (Munawar, 2022; Fadillah & Yusuf, 2022; Jannah & Harun, 2023; Cahyaningrum & Diana, 2023; Hukamak et al., 2023; Nursalam et al., 2023; Mursid et al., 2026). Meanwhile, studies on emotional intelligence have generally examined leadership effectiveness and organizational relationships outside the Islamic early childhood education context (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2023; Hsieh et al., 2024; Venter et al., 2024).

By examining both constructs within the same empirical setting, this study provides additional evidence regarding leadership characteristics associated with curriculum-management practices during curriculum reform. The contribution of this study does not involve proposing emotional intelligence as the sole explanation for curriculum-management quality. Rather, it highlights emotional intelligence as one leadership characteristic that may be considered in discussions regarding leadership development for early childhood education institutions.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that leadership development programs for Raudhatul Athfal principals may consider integrating curriculum-management competencies with interpersonal leadership development, including emotional awareness, communication skills, collaborative practices, and reflective leadership. However, such

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implications should be considered alongside the limitations of the study design and the need for further evidence from broader samples and different research approaches.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study employed a cross-sectional design; therefore, the observed association between emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices cannot establish temporal direction or causal relationships. Future research using longitudinal or mixed-method approaches may provide deeper understanding regarding how leadership characteristics develop alongside curriculum implementation processes.

Second, both variables were measured through self-report questionnaires completed by the same respondents. Although this approach allowed the measurement of principals' perceptions regarding their leadership characteristics and curriculum-management practices, it may increase the possibility of common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2024). Future studies may incorporate multiple data sources, such as teacher assessments, observational data, or document analysis, to provide broader perspectives.

Third, the study involved 39 Raudhatul Athfal principals within one city. Therefore, the findings represent the observed context of participating institutions and should not be generalized to all early childhood education leaders in Indonesia. Future research involving larger samples across different regions may provide stronger evidence regarding the relationship between emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices in diverse early childhood education contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the statistical association between Raudhatul Athfal principals' emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Serang City. The findings indicate that emotional intelligence scores were positively and significantly associated with curriculum-management practices scores among participating principals, providing contextual quantitative evidence regarding the relationship between leadership characteristics and curriculum implementation processes in Islamic early childhood education. This study contributes to existing research by examining emotional intelligence and curriculum-management practices within the specific context of Raudhatul Athfal institutions, where principals coordinate curriculum implementation through interactions with teachers, families, and other stakeholders. However, the findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the cross-sectional design, self-reported measurements, and the involvement of participants from a single geographical setting. Future research involving broader samples, multiple data sources, and longitudinal approaches is recommended to further examine the relationship between leadership characteristics and curriculum-management practices in early childhood education contexts

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