

Academic Supervision as an Instructional Leadership Process: Evidence from Early Childhood Education in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background/purpose. Academic supervision is widely recognized as a strategic mechanism for improving teacher professionalism and instructional quality. Nevertheless, in many early childhood education (ECE) settings, supervision continues to be implemented primarily as an administrative obligation rather than as a continuous professional learning process. This study aims to examine how academic supervision is enacted as an instructional leadership practice in ECE by exploring its implementation processes, challenges, and contributions to teachers' professional practices.

Materials/methods. This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design involving eight kindergartens in Kendari City, Indonesia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using within-case and cross-case analysis to identify recurring patterns and contextual differences across cases.

Results. The findings reveal that the effectiveness of academic supervision is determined less by school status than by principals' instructional leadership, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and the consistency of follow-up mentoring. Public kindergartens tend to exhibit stronger formal supervisory structures, whereas private kindergartens demonstrate greater relational flexibility in supervisory practices. Academic supervision that integrates reflective dialogue, emotional support, classroom feedback, and sustained mentoring contributes to meaningful improvements in teachers' instructional practices and professional development.

Conclusion. Effective academic supervision in ECE extends beyond administrative compliance and functions as an instructional leadership process that promotes continuous teacher learning. Integrative supervision characterized by reflective collaboration, supportive relationships, and ongoing mentoring strengthens teacher professionalism and enhances the quality of classroom instruction across both public and private kindergarten contexts.

1. INTRODUCTION

Academic supervision is increasingly positioned as a systemic practice of instructional leadership that plays a strategic role in improving educational quality, particularly in early childhood education (ECE) (Zhang et al., 2022; Lorensius et al., 2022; Almufarreh et al., 2023). From this perspective, academic supervision extends beyond evaluation or inspection and

becomes a planned and continuous process through which school principals guide pedagogical practices, support teachers' professional learning, and strengthen instructional quality (Legede et al., 2025; Moshel, 2025). As instructional leaders, principals enact supervision through classroom observation, professional dialogue, feedback, mentoring, and the development of collaborative professional cultures (Hidayat & Wulandari, 2020; Ghamrawi et al., 2024). Thus, the significance of academic supervision lies not only in whether supervisory activities are formally conducted, but also in how these activities are translated into meaningful professional learning and instructional improvement.

Research across educational contexts indicates that effective supervision is contextual, reflective, and collaborative (Van et al., 2023; Olmos-Vega et al., 2023; Saritepeci & Durak, 2024). Supervision supported by professional dialogue, constructive feedback, mentoring, and reflective practice is more likely to promote teacher development than supervision oriented primarily toward compliance (Mannie, 2022; Hussain et al., 2025; Tiruneh et al., 2025). In ECE, this process is particularly important because the quality of teacher–child interactions and instructional practices has implications for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Wustmann et al., 2022; Rankin et al., 2022). Academic supervision can therefore function as a mechanism for helping teachers refine instructional practices, respond to children's developmental needs, and engage in sustained professional reflection (Herut & Setlhako, 2025). However, the existence of formal supervision structures does not necessarily indicate that supervision has become an effective instructional leadership process.

This distinction is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where school principals frequently face extensive administrative responsibilities, limited time, and constrained resources that can reduce opportunities for sustained instructional supervision (Mulyani et al., 2020; Noor & Sofyaningrum, 2020; Karim et al., 2025). Consequently, academic supervision may remain oriented toward fulfilling formal requirements rather than supporting continuous professional learning (Maisyaroh et al., 2021; Bjork, 2005). Such conditions create a process problem: although supervision may include planning, classroom observation, documentation, and reporting, the extent to which these activities are connected through professional dialogue, feedback, mentoring, and systematic follow-up remains uneven. The issue, therefore, is not simply whether academic supervision is implemented, but how its different components are enacted and connected as a leadership process that can influence teachers' instructional practices.

The institutional context may shape this process without necessarily determining its effectiveness. Public and private ECE institutions in Indonesia operate under different organizational conditions. Public schools generally function within more formal bureaucratic and accountability structures, whereas private schools may have greater managerial flexibility (Octarra & Hendriati, 2018; Caruso & Fawcett, 2014). These differences can influence the form,

documentation, and flexibility of supervisory practices. However, treating public and private schools as fundamentally different supervisory models may obscure a more important issue: how principals transform supervisory structures into professional learning opportunities. A formally structured supervision system may provide accountability but have limited instructional influence when follow-up is weak, while a flexible relational approach may support professional learning but lack continuity when documentation and systematic follow-up are insufficient. The relevant analytical issue is therefore the relationship between structural and relational dimensions of supervision and how this relationship shapes its instructional function.

This process-oriented issue is also evident in the context of Kendari City. Empirical evidence from early childhood education oversight indicates that academic supervision remains constrained by limited documentation, weak reporting systems, and insufficient follow-up after supervisory activities (Juhadira et al., 2024). Principals' understanding of supervision as instructional leadership also varies, with supervision sometimes being perceived primarily as an administrative obligation rather than as a professional development process (Windayani, 2025). Time constraints and workload pressures further limit comprehensive supervision implementation (Arif et al., 2023), while institutional support and leadership commitment influence how supervision is enacted across schools (Budiman et al., 2024; Setyati & Niron, 2025). These conditions make Kendari a relevant context for examining not merely the presence of academic supervision, but the processes through which supervision becomes, or fails to become, an instructional leadership practice.

Despite the growing literature on academic supervision, an important conceptual and process gap remains. Existing studies have established the value of supervision for teacher professionalism and instructional quality, but less attention has been given to how the different elements of supervision are connected in practice as an instructional leadership process, particularly in ECE settings. More specifically, limited empirical attention has been given to how formal supervisory structures are enacted through relational interactions, how classroom observation and feedback are translated into sustained follow-up, and how these processes are associated with changes in teachers' instructional practices. This gap is important because supervision effectiveness cannot be adequately understood by examining individual supervisory activities in isolation. Rather, it requires examining the process through which structural accountability, professional relationships, follow-up, and instructional improvement become interconnected.

Accordingly, this study examines academic supervision as an instructional leadership process in early childhood education in Kendari City, Indonesia. The study focuses on how supervision is structured and enacted, how principals and teachers engage in relational and reflective supervisory interactions, how follow-up connects supervisory activities with

professional learning, and how these processes are associated with changes in teachers' instructional practices. Public and private kindergartens are included as contextual settings through which variations in the enactment of this process can be examined, rather than as the primary basis for determining supervision effectiveness. The study is guided by the following research question: How is academic supervision enacted as an instructional leadership process, and how do structural, relational, and follow-up processes contribute to teachers' instructional improvement in early childhood education?

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multiple case study design. This design was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of academic supervision by kindergarten principals, encompassing the processes of planning, implementation, documentation, and follow-up within authentic school contexts. A multiple case study design enables comparative analysis across (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2022) schools with different institutional statuses public and private kindergartens thereby providing a more comprehensive and contextualized portrayal of academic supervision practices.

2.2. Sites and Participants

The study was conducted in eight kindergartens in Kendari City. The selection of these sites aimed to represent variations in early childhood education organizational contexts, allowing academic supervision to be examined as a form of systemic instructional leadership, as reflected in the focus of this study. By involving both public and private kindergartens, the research does not seek to normatively compare effectiveness, but rather to explore how academic supervision is enacted as an instructional leadership practice within two distinct organizational settings.

The research participants included kindergarten principals as the primary actors in implementing academic supervision, kindergarten teachers as those directly experiencing the supervision process, and kindergarten supervisors as key informants providing external perspectives on supervisory practices at the school level. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement, experience, and strategic roles within the academic supervision system. Accordingly, the data reflect academic supervision not merely as an individual activity of principals, but as an instructional leadership practice integrated into the broader school system.

2.3. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through methodological triangulation to enhance the depth and trustworthiness of the findings. The techniques employed included in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, and supervisors to explore their understandings, experiences, and

perceptions related to the planning, implementation, challenges, documentation, and follow-up of academic supervision. Observations were undertaken to directly examine the practice of academic supervision conducted by principals, professional interactions between principals and teachers, and classroom teaching practices as implications of academic supervision. Documents analyzed included academic supervision programs, supervision instruments, classroom observation records, supervision reports, and evidence of supervisory follow-up actions. Document analysis aimed to assess the consistency between documented supervision plans and reports and the actual practices implemented in schools.

2.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Analysis was conducted iteratively and concurrently with data collection and interpretation. In the multiple case study design, the analysis proceeded through two interconnected levels: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis.

During data condensation, interview transcripts, observation notes, and supervision-related documents were reviewed and organized according to the research focus. Initial coding was conducted by identifying meaningful segments of data related to the enactment of academic supervision, including supervision planning, classroom observation, professional dialogue, feedback, mentoring, documentation, follow-up, and perceived changes in teachers' instructional practices. Codes were generated from recurring meanings and actions evident across participants' accounts, observations, and documents rather than being predetermined solely from the conceptual framework.

Related initial codes were then compared and grouped into broader categories that represented recurring dimensions of the supervision process. For example, codes concerning supervision programs, schedules, instruments, and documentation were grouped into structural aspects of supervision, whereas codes concerning professional dialogue, constructive feedback, emotional support, and mentoring were grouped into relational aspects. Codes concerning post-observation reflection, coaching, mentoring, and improvement-oriented recommendations were examined as follow-up processes, while codes describing changes in lesson planning, teaching methods, learning media, classroom management, and teachers' reflective awareness were grouped as instructional changes.

Within-case analysis (Table 1) was subsequently conducted to examine how these categories were enacted and connected within each kindergarten as a holistic case. Each case was analyzed in relation to the planning, implementation, documentation, and follow-up of academic supervision, as well as the interactions between principals and teachers. Data displays were used to organize case-level patterns and to examine consistency across interviews, observations, and documents. This process enabled the researchers to identify the

distinctive characteristics of supervision within each case while maintaining the contextual integrity of individual schools.

Table 1. Stages of Within-Case Analysis (Vohra, 2024).

Stages	Outcomes
Case Profile Development	1. School status (public/private) 2. Number of teachers and the principal 3. Principal's professional background 4. School organizational structure 5. Condition of facilities and infrastructure supporting academic supervision
Analysis of the Academic Supervision Process	1. Planning of academic supervision (programs, schedules, instruments) 2. Implementation of supervision (classroom observation, reflective dialogue, mentoring, coaching) 3. Principal's role in supervision (instructional, collaborative, or administrative)
Analysis of Documentation and Follow-Up	1. Completeness of supervision documents (programs, instruments, reports) 2. Quality of supervision record-keeping 3. Forms of supervisory follow-up (mentoring, training, teacher reflection) 4. Consistency between supervisory practices and written documentation
Identification of Key Themes per Case	1. Academic supervision initially triggered tension but ultimately fostered professional reflection. 2. Collaborative and humanistic approaches enhanced teachers' acceptance of supervision. 3. Supervision accompanied by constructive feedback had a tangible impact on teaching practices. 4. Time constraints and documentation limitations emerged as major challenges in academic supervision. 5. The principal's role as a mentor was a decisive factor in supervision effectiveness.

Cross-case analysis (Table 2) was then conducted by systematically comparing the categories and patterns identified across the cases. Comparisons examined how structural supervision, relational interactions, follow-up practices, and instructional changes appeared across public and private kindergartens. Recurring patterns were retained as common findings, while variations between cases were examined in relation to institutional context, leadership practices, available time, documentation, and supporting conditions. The comparison was not used to rank public and private schools, but to identify how contextual conditions shaped the enactment of academic supervision.

Table 2. Stages of Cross-Case Analysis (Pedersen & Blok, 2024)

Stages	Outcomes
Case Grouping	1. School status: public and private kindergartens 2. Level of supervision completeness: optimal, adequate, limited 3. Principals' supervision styles: instructional, collaborative, reflective

Stages	Outcomes
Comparison of Key Supervision Aspects	1. Planning of academic supervision 2. Implementation of classroom supervision 3. Availability and quality of documentation 4. Follow-up actions based on supervision results 5. Institutional support and facilities
Identification of Common Patterns	1. Public kindergartens tend to have more complete supervision documentation; however, the implementation of supervision is often less intensive due to administrative workload. 2. Private kindergartens demonstrate greater flexibility in supervision practices and adopt more collaborative approaches, although supervision documentation is relatively limited. 3. Supervision integrated with mentoring and teacher reflection shows a more tangible impact on teacher performance, regardless of school status.
Analysis of Determining Factors	1. Principals' leadership capacity 2. Understanding of academic supervision 3. Support from supervisors and local education authorities 4. Availability of time and supporting facilities
Synthesis of Findings	Based on the cross-case analysis, it can be synthesized that the effectiveness of academic supervision is not solely determined by school status (public or private), but rather by the quality of principal leadership, the use of collaborative supervision approaches, and the consistency of supervisory follow-up. Academic supervision oriented toward mentoring and professional development has been shown to have a greater impact on improving instructional quality than supervision that is merely administrative in nature.

Through iterative comparison between codes, categories, case-level patterns, and cross-case findings, broader themes were developed. The final themes were retained when they were supported by recurring evidence across multiple data sources and cases and when they provided an explanatory account of how academic supervision was enacted as instructional leadership. This analytical process resulted in five overarching themes: (1) structural enactment of academic supervision; (2) relational enactment of academic supervision; (3) follow-up as the connecting mechanism; (4) instructional changes associated with sustained supervision; and (5) contextual differences between public and private kindergartens. Conclusions were continuously verified by comparing emerging interpretations with the original data, documentation, and evidence from different participant groups.

The resulting analytical process therefore moved from raw empirical data to initial codes, categories, within-case patterns, cross-case comparisons, and final themes, allowing the findings to capture both the processes of academic supervision and the contextual conditions in which those processes were enacted.

2.5. Trustworthiness of the Data

Data trustworthiness was ensured through the application of several strategies, including source and method triangulation, member checking with key informants, peer debriefing, and the development of an audit trail to systematically document all stages of the research

process. These strategies were employed to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings.

2.6. Research Ethics

This study was conducted in accordance with established research ethics principles, including obtaining informed consent from participants, maintaining the confidentiality of participants' and institutions' identities, and using research data responsibly for academic purposes only.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The findings are presented through five themes emerging from the within-case and cross-case analysis: (1) structural enactment of academic supervision, (2) relational enactment of academic supervision, (3) follow-up as the connecting mechanism, (4) instructional changes associated with sustained supervision, and (5) contextual differences between public and private kindergartens. These themes represent interconnected dimensions of how academic supervision was enacted as an instructional leadership process across the cases.

3.1. Within-Case Analysis

Across the cases, academic supervision was implemented through a recognizable structural cycle involving planning, scheduling, classroom observation, documentation, reflection, and follow-up. Principals generally viewed supervision as an important mechanism for monitoring and improving teachers' instructional practices and for aligning classroom practices with school expectations. Supervision programs, schedules, observation instruments, and supervision records were used to provide structure and accountability to the process.

However, the presence of formal supervisory structures did not necessarily determine the intensity or continuity of supervision. Public kindergartens generally demonstrated more structured supervision procedures and more comprehensive documentation. Routine schedules and formal supervisory instruments provided clearer procedural arrangements. Nevertheless, principals in these settings also faced substantial administrative workloads and time constraints, which sometimes limited opportunities for intensive individual mentoring and follow-up.

In private kindergartens, supervision was generally implemented with greater flexibility. Formal procedures and documentation were less consistently emphasized in some cases, while supervisory activities were more frequently integrated into daily interactions between principals and teachers. Consequently, the structural enactment of supervision varied across cases according to available time, administrative demands, leadership practices, and institutional conditions.

The findings indicate that structural arrangements provided an important foundation for academic supervision, but their instructional value depended on how they were subsequently enacted through interpersonal interaction and follow-up. Thus, formal planning and documentation functioned as enabling structures rather than as sufficient conditions for effective supervision.

3.2. Relational Enactment of Academic Supervision

The relational dimension of supervision emerged strongly from teachers' experiences. At the initial stage of classroom observation, teachers commonly reported nervousness, tension, awkwardness, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes. These responses occurred across both public and private kindergartens and were particularly evident among teachers with lower confidence or limited previous experience with supervision.

Teachers' perceptions changed after supervision when principals provided constructive feedback and supportive interaction. Teachers subsequently described feeling more appreciated, supported, motivated, and confident. Supervision was increasingly perceived not as a judgmental or threatening activity but as an opportunity to identify strengths and areas requiring improvement. This shift indicates that the interpersonal manner in which supervision was conducted shaped how teachers interpreted and responded to the supervisory process.

Principals commonly adopted collaborative and guiding approaches rather than relying exclusively on evaluative assessment. Supervisory interactions included professional discussion, post-observation reflection, motivational support, appreciation, constructive feedback, and practical suggestions for improvement. Teachers considered supervision particularly beneficial when principals acted as mentors and facilitators rather than as inspectors primarily concerned with administrative compliance.

The relational enactment of supervision was also reflected in differentiated approaches to teachers' professional needs. In several cases, novice teachers received more intensive technical guidance, step-by-step assistance, and more frequent classroom observation. Senior teachers were more often engaged through professional dialogue, coaching, reflective discussion, and exchanges concerning instructional innovation. However, this differentiation was not universal, as some principals emphasized that supervisory approaches should respond to individual professional needs rather than years of service alone.

Overall, the findings show that the relational quality of supervision influenced teachers' willingness to engage with feedback and reflection. Constructive interaction transformed initial psychological tension into greater acceptance of supervision and created conditions for professional learning.

3.3. Follow-up as the Connecting Mechanism

Follow-up emerged as a central mechanism connecting classroom observation and supervisory feedback with teachers' subsequent professional learning. Across cases, supervision was considered more meaningful when principals did not end the process with classroom observation or the delivery of feedback, but continued with reflection, mentoring, coaching, and practical improvement-oriented guidance.

Post-observation discussions enabled principals and teachers to interpret classroom events and identify areas for improvement. Principals provided suggestions concerning teaching methods, learning media, classroom management, and lesson planning, while teachers were encouraged to reflect on their instructional practices. In several cases, follow-up was conducted through subsequent mentoring or informal discussions rather than through a single formal supervisory meeting.

The continuity of follow-up varied across cases. Where principals had sufficient time and maintained regular interaction with teachers, supervision was more likely to develop into an ongoing professional learning process. Conversely, administrative workloads and limited time sometimes interrupted the continuity of mentoring and follow-up, particularly when supervision was strongly tied to formal administrative schedules.

Teachers' accounts further indicated that the most useful supervisory experiences were those accompanied by concrete and continuing guidance. Thus, follow-up did not merely represent an additional administrative stage after supervision; it connected observation and feedback with teachers' opportunities to reflect, practice, and improve.

The findings therefore position follow-up as a connecting mechanism within academic supervision. The sequence observed across cases was not simply observation followed by reporting, but rather observation → feedback → reflection → mentoring/coaching → instructional adjustment. The continuity of this process distinguished supervision oriented toward professional learning from supervision oriented primarily toward administrative completion.

3.4. Instructional Changes Associated with Sustained Supervision

Across cases, teachers reported changes in several aspects of instructional practice following academic supervision. These included improved lesson planning, greater variety in teaching methods and learning media, more structured classroom management, and increased awareness of adapting instruction to children's needs. Teachers also reported greater self-confidence and motivation, which supported greater openness toward instructional innovation.

The changes were more evident when supervision was implemented continuously and accompanied by reflective dialogue and follow-up. Rather than being associated solely with the observation event, instructional changes were linked to the continuing interaction

between principals and teachers after observation. Mentoring, feedback, and practical suggestions enabled teachers to identify specific areas for improvement and consider how these could be addressed in subsequent teaching activities.

The findings also indicate that supervision contributed to teachers' reflective awareness. Teachers became more attentive to the relationship between their instructional decisions and children's learning needs and were encouraged to reconsider teaching strategies, classroom management, and the use of learning media. This reflective dimension strengthened the professional learning function of supervision.

The evidence therefore suggests an association between sustained supervisory processes and improvements in teachers' reported instructional practices. The contribution of supervision was most visible when observation was embedded within a broader cycle of reflection, mentoring, and follow-up rather than treated as an isolated evaluative event.

3.5. Contextual Differences Between Public and Private Kindergartens

The cross-case analysis identified differences in the way academic supervision was enacted across public and private kindergartens. These differences were primarily contextual rather than indicative of the superiority of one institutional type over another.

Public kindergartens generally demonstrated stronger formal structures, more routine supervision schedules, and more comprehensive documentation. These features provided clearer accountability and procedural consistency. At the same time, principals' administrative responsibilities and limited time sometimes constrained the intensity of individual mentoring and the continuity of follow-up.

Private kindergartens generally demonstrated greater flexibility in organizing supervision and closer day-to-day relational interactions between principals and teachers. Mentoring could occur informally through daily discussions, direct guidance, and ongoing professional interaction. However, in some cases, supervision documentation was less systematically managed and depended more heavily on individual principals' practices.

These differences indicate complementary strengths rather than a simple public-private hierarchy. Formal structures and documentation in public kindergartens provide important accountability mechanisms, while the relational flexibility observed in private kindergartens creates opportunities for more continuous professional interaction. The findings suggest that effective academic supervision can benefit from combining these dimensions: structured accountability needs to be connected with supportive relationships and sustained follow-up.

The cross-case findings indicate that school status alone does not explain the effectiveness of academic supervision. More consequential factors include principals' instructional leadership capacity, the quality of principal-teacher interactions, the continuity of mentoring and follow-up, and the institutional conditions that enable these processes. Public and private contexts therefore function as boundary conditions that shape how supervision is

enacted, rather than as direct determinants of its effectiveness. In general, teachers perceive academic supervision as a professional experience that is both emotional and reflective. At the initial stage, most teachers reported feelings of nervousness, tension, awkwardness, and fear of making mistakes, particularly when supervision was conducted through direct classroom observation.

This condition was consistently found among teachers in both public and private kindergartens and was especially experienced by teachers with lower self-confidence or limited prior exposure to supervision. However, after the supervision process took place and principals provided constructive feedback, teachers' perceptions changed significantly. Teachers reported feeling supported, appreciated, motivated, and more confident. Supervision was no longer viewed as a judgmental activity but rather as a form of professional learning that helped teachers identify their strengths and areas for improvement in teaching.

DISCUSSION

4.1. Academic supervision beyond administrative compliance

One of the key findings of this study is the emergence of multiple barriers in the implementation of academic supervision, including limited time availability, heavy administrative workloads, weak supervision documentation, and teachers' psychological tension during supervision. These findings should not be interpreted as individual shortcomings of principals or teachers, but rather as systemic issues within educational governance, particularly at the early childhood education level.

The high administrative burden borne by school principals, for instance, reflects an education system that continues to position principals simultaneously as administrative managers and instructional leaders. This condition often reduces academic supervision to a formal activity that is difficult to follow up meaningfully. Consequently, limitations in supervision should not be simplistically attributed to a lack of principals' commitment, but rather understood as the result of a system design that has not fully supported instructional leadership practices.

Similarly, teachers' initial resistance and anxiety during supervision should not be viewed merely as personal defensiveness. The findings indicate that such anxiety is closely linked to a historical culture of supervision that has been predominantly evaluative and hierarchical in nature. This suggests the need for a transformation of supervision systems from control-oriented approaches toward professional development-oriented practices that emphasize learning and growth.

4.2. Structural accountability and relational professional learning

This study contributes theoretically by reaffirming that academic supervision constitutes an integrative instructional leadership practice rather than a purely managerial procedure.

The findings support theories of principal leadership that emphasize indirect influences on teacher performance through school climate, professional relationships, and a culture of learning (Kaplan & Owings, 2023; Zhang, et al., 2023; Zackariasson & Magnusson, 2024; Zhang, et al., 2025). At the same time, the study extends these theories by highlighting emotional and relational dimensions as critical factors in the effectiveness of academic supervision.

Another theoretical contribution lies in integrating structural and humanistic approaches to academic supervision. Previous theoretical perspectives often treat system-based supervision and relationship-based supervision as separate domains (Effendi & Sahertian, 2023; Gencoglu, et al., 2025). This study demonstrates that these approaches are not dichotomous but complementary. Structured supervision without empathetic relationships risks becoming bureaucratic, while humanistic supervision without strong documentation systems risks losing accountability and sustainability. Moreover, this study enriches the literature on consistent follow-up by showing that supervision follow-up through mentoring and coaching is a decisive element in changing teachers' instructional practices. Thus, academic supervision should be understood as a continuous process encompassing observation, reflection, mentoring, and ongoing evaluation.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer important implications for education administrators, school principals, and policymakers. First, the results underscore the need to strengthen principals' capacity as instructional leaders, particularly in mentoring, coaching, and providing constructive feedback. Principal development should not focus solely on managerial competencies, but must also encompass pedagogical and relational skills. Second, the study highlights the importance of reducing administrative burdens so that principals have sufficient time and space to conduct meaningful academic supervision. Without policy support to simplify administrative complexity, academic supervision is likely to remain marginalized in school practice. Third, the findings indicate the need to strengthen supervision documentation systems that are simple, flexible, and context-sensitive. Documentation should not function merely as administrative evidence, but also as a tool for professional reflection and follow-up planning. Accordingly, supervision documentation should be designed as an integral component of teachers' professional learning.

4.3. Follow-up as the mechanism of instructional leadership

The study also reveals contextual differences in the characteristics of academic supervision practices between public and private kindergartens. Public kindergartens tend to have more structured and well-documented supervision systems, aligned with bureaucratic demands and public accountability. However, this structure is often accompanied by limited flexibility due to high administrative workloads. In contrast, private kindergartens demonstrate greater flexibility in implementing academic supervision, with more intensive relational and informal mentoring approaches. Closer interpersonal relationships between principals and

teachers facilitate more fluid and continuous professional dialogue. Nevertheless, this flexibility is often not supported by strong documentation systems, making supervision practices highly dependent on principals' personal initiatives.

These findings suggest that the strengths and limitations of public and private kindergartens should not be viewed dichotomously. Instead, optimal academic supervision practices require cross-contextual learning, whereby public kindergartens can adopt more humanistic and flexible approaches from private institutions, while private kindergartens can strengthen supervision structures and accountability mechanisms as practiced in public schools.

4.4. Institutional context as a boundary condition

Within the local context of Kendari City, the findings are highly relevant to the real challenges faced by early childhood education, including limited resources, complex principal roles, and institutional capacity variations. Reports from kindergarten supervisors in Kendari identifying weak supervision documentation and follow-up further confirm that academic supervision is a structural issue requiring a systemic approach. Nevertheless, the findings also have global relevance. International literature consistently indicates that challenges in academic supervision such as principals' workload, teachers' resistance to supervision, and the need for collaborative approaches are universal issues across education systems worldwide (Keddie, et al., 2023; Sugiar, et al., 2024; Pinckney, 2025).

Accordingly, this study contributes to global discourse by providing empirical evidence from a developing country context, particularly at the early childhood education level. The study demonstrates that principles of effective academic supervision namely instructional leadership, humanistic mentoring, professional collaboration, and sustained follow-up are cross-contextual and can be globally adapted with appropriate local adjustments.

4.5. Theoretical contribution

This study contributes to the understanding of academic supervision by conceptualizing it as a process of instructional leadership rather than as an isolated administrative or evaluative activity. The findings indicate that the instructional function of supervision emerges through the interaction of four interconnected dimensions: structural enactment, relational enactment, sustained follow-up, and instructional change. This process-oriented interpretation extends conventional understandings of supervision that tend to emphasize planning, observation, documentation, or evaluation as discrete supervisory activities.

The first theoretical contribution concerns the relationship between structural and relational dimensions of academic supervision. The findings show that formal structures, including supervision programs, schedules, observation instruments, and documentation, provide an important basis for accountability and procedural continuity. However, these structures alone do not ensure meaningful professional learning. Their instructional value

depends on how principals translate formal supervisory activities into professional dialogue, constructive feedback, mentoring, and reflection. Academic supervision can therefore be understood as an integrated process in which structural accountability and relational professional learning are complementary rather than competing dimensions.

The second contribution concerns the position of follow-up within instructional leadership. The findings demonstrate that classroom observation and feedback do not automatically produce instructional improvement. Follow-up through reflection, mentoring, coaching, and practical improvement-oriented guidance connects what is identified during supervision with subsequent changes in teachers' professional practices. In this sense, follow-up functions as a connecting mechanism between supervision and instructional improvement. This finding suggests that the effectiveness of academic supervision should be understood not primarily by whether observation occurs, but by whether supervisory information is translated into sustained professional learning.

The third contribution concerns the relational dimension of instructional leadership. Teachers' initial nervousness, anxiety, and fear during classroom observation changed when supervision was accompanied by constructive feedback, emotional support, and respectful professional interaction. This indicates that the instructional leadership function of supervision is partly enacted through the quality of principal-teacher relationships. Supportive relationships can transform supervision from an evaluative experience into a professional learning opportunity, thereby strengthening teachers' willingness to reflect on and improve their instructional practices.

Finally, the study contributes a contextual understanding of academic supervision by showing that institutional setting shapes the conditions under which supervision is enacted but does not by itself determine its effectiveness. Public kindergartens tend to provide stronger formal structures and documentation, whereas private kindergartens demonstrate greater relational flexibility. These differences represent complementary institutional strengths rather than a hierarchy of effectiveness. The findings therefore suggest that academic supervision is best understood as a context-sensitive instructional leadership process in which formal accountability, relational support, and sustained follow-up need to operate together.

Taken together, these findings support a process-oriented conceptualization of academic supervision (Figure 1) as structural enactment, relational enactment, sustained follow-up, instructional change, with institutional context shaping the conditions under which the process occurs. This conceptualization shifts attention from supervision as an administrative event toward supervision as a continuous mechanism of professional learning and instructional leadership.

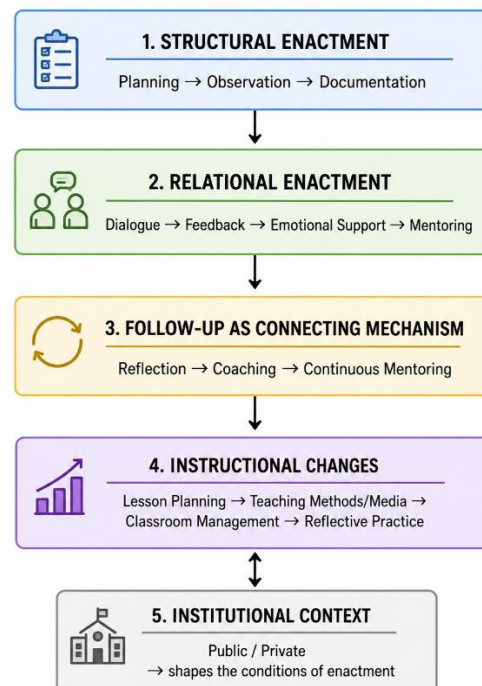


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of academic supervision as an instructional leadership process

4.6. Practical Implications

The findings have several practical implications for school principals, supervisors, and education authorities. First, school principals should treat academic supervision as a continuous professional learning process rather than as a periodic administrative requirement. Supervision programs should provide sufficient opportunities for classroom observation, reflective dialogue, constructive feedback, and subsequent mentoring.

Second, principals need to strengthen their capacity to conduct relational forms of instructional leadership. The findings indicate that teachers' initial anxiety can be reduced when supervision is conducted through supportive communication, appreciation, constructive feedback, and collaborative reflection. Principal development programs should therefore include mentoring, coaching, feedback, and interpersonal communication alongside technical supervisory competencies.

Third, supervision systems should strengthen follow-up mechanisms. Observation and documentation should be followed by clearly identified areas for improvement, reflective discussion, mentoring, and subsequent monitoring. Follow-up documentation should be sufficiently simple and flexible to support professional learning without creating additional administrative burdens.

Fourth, education authorities and school managers should recognize the contextual conditions under which supervision is implemented. Public schools may benefit from strengthening relational flexibility and reducing administrative constraints, while private schools

may benefit from developing more systematic documentation and accountability mechanisms. The objective is not to make the two institutional settings identical, but to combine their complementary strengths in supporting continuous teacher learning.

Practical improvement should focus on connecting supervisory structures with meaningful professional interaction and sustained follow-up. Such an approach can strengthen the capacity of academic supervision to support teachers' instructional development.

4.7. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the study employed a qualitative multiple-case design within early childhood education settings in Kendari City. The findings therefore provide contextual and analytical insights rather than statistically generalizable conclusions. Second, although the study incorporated interviews, observations, and document analysis, the depth and availability of supervisory documentation varied across cases. This variation may have influenced the extent to which some supervisory processes could be traced through documentary evidence.

Third, the study focuses primarily on the enactment of academic supervision and its relationship with teachers' reported instructional practices. It does not directly measure children's learning outcomes or examine the long-term effects of supervision on instructional quality. Future research could therefore employ longitudinal designs to examine how sustained supervision influences teachers' practices over time and whether these changes are associated with broader educational outcomes.

Future studies may also examine the proposed process-oriented conceptualization across different regions and institutional contexts. Comparative research could investigate how structural accountability, relational supervision, and follow-up interact under different organizational conditions. Mixed-methods or longitudinal research could further examine the relationship between the continuity of academic supervision, teacher professional development, instructional quality, and child learning outcomes.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that academic supervision plays a strategic role in enhancing teacher professionalism and the quality of early childhood education when implemented as a continuous, collaborative, and reflective professional development process. Effective academic supervision is no longer oriented toward fulfilling administrative obligations but focuses on strengthening the role of the school principal as a learning leader who can build empathetic professional relationships, provide constructive feedback, and ensure meaningful follow-up actions.

This study highlights that the effectiveness of academic supervision is more influenced by leadership approaches and the quality of supervisory interactions than by the school's status as public or private kindergarten. The contextual differences between these institutions are complementary, suggesting that academic supervision yields optimal impact when combining structured systems with a humanistic approach. Moreover, challenges in implementation such as limited time, administrative workload, and weak documentation—are systemic issues that require policy support and capacity-building for principals, rather than being attributed solely to individual shortcomings. Therefore, academic supervision should be positioned as a core strategy for teacher professional development and fostering a professional learning culture. Well-planned, documented, and continuous guidance-oriented supervision is believed to ensure sustained improvement in early childhood teaching quality and educational service.

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