



The Mediating Role of Professionalism in the Relationship Between Organizational Culture, Transformational Leadership, and Asatidz Performance

Muhammad Salim Faroghy^{1*}, Bibin Rubini², Iyan Irdiyansyah³

Universitas Pakuan

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Salim : msalimfaroghy@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of Pesantren Organizational Culture and Transformational Leadership on Asatidz Performance, with Professionalism as a mediating variable. The study employed a quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Data were collected from 150 asatidz selected through proportionate stratified random sampling from several pesantren institutions. The analysis applied the Higher-Order Construct approach with the disjoint two-stage method using SmartPLS 4. The results showed that Professionalism had the strongest positive effect on Asatidz Performance. Pesantren Organizational Culture significantly influenced both Professionalism and Asatidz Performance. Transformational Leadership significantly affected Professionalism but did not directly influence Asatidz Performance. Mediation analysis revealed that Professionalism partially mediated the relationship between Pesantren Organizational Culture and Asatidz Performance, while fully mediating the relationship between Transformational Leadership and Asatidz Performance. These findings indicate that professionalism is the primary mechanism through which organizational culture and leadership contribute to improving the performance of asatidz. The study highlights the importance of strengthening professional values, organizational culture, and leadership practices to support sustainable performance improvement in pesantren educational institutions.

INTRODUCTION

The quality of education in Islamic boarding schools is closely associated with the performance of *asatidz*, referring to Islamic boarding school teachers who simultaneously function as educators (Pacasuma and Quirapb, 2023), mentors, spiritual guides, and role models within a twenty-four-hour educational environment (Wulandari *et al.*, 2025). Unlike teachers in formal schools, *asatidz* carry broader social and moral responsibilities because they are directly involved in shaping students' religious character (Badrun, 2024), discipline, and daily behavior within the *pesantren* system (Wibowo, 2025). Consequently, the effectiveness of Islamic boarding schools is not merely determined by curriculum implementation but also by the quality of *asatidz* performance in managing learning processes (Nugroho *et al.*, 2025), fostering student development, and maintaining institutional values (Sofwatillah and Anwar, 2025). However, the rapid transformation of educational systems, increasing organizational complexity, and growing public expectations toward educational quality have created substantial challenges for Islamic boarding schools in maintaining optimal educator performance. Several recent studies indicate that teacher performance in faith-based educational institutions is often influenced by organizational culture, leadership patterns, and professional capacity, particularly in institutions characterized by strong traditional values and hierarchical authority structures (Ikbal *et al.*, 2023; Muliawan *et al.*, 2022).

Previous studies have consistently reported that organizational culture and transformational leadership contribute significantly to educational effectiveness and teacher performance (Wulandari *et al.*, 2025). Organizational culture provides shared values, behavioral norms, collective commitment, and institutional identity that shape educators' work attitudes and professional conduct (RahmawRachmawatiati *et al.*, 2025). In Islamic boarding schools, organizational culture is deeply rooted in religious traditions, obedience, discipline, collective solidarity, and moral responsibility, making it an essential factor influencing *asatidz* performance (Purnomo, 2024). Transformational leadership also plays an important role in inspiring, motivating, and empowering educators through visionary direction, exemplary conduct, and interpersonal influence (Damayanti *et al.*, 2025). Nevertheless, the relationship between organizational culture, transformational leadership, and performance cannot be fully understood without considering professionalism as an intervening mechanism (Bahtiar and Mashlahah, 2025). Professionalism reflects pedagogical competence, ethical commitment, discipline, self-development, and responsibility toward educational duties (Arifin *et al.*, 2024). Educators with high professionalism tend to internalize institutional values more effectively and respond positively to leadership influence, which subsequently strengthens their work performance (Rahmatika and Nafidah, 2025). Professionalism therefore has the potential to function as a strategic mediating variable connecting organizational and leadership factors with *asatidz* performance in Islamic boarding schools.

Despite the growing body of literature concerning teacher performance, important limitations remain unresolved. Most previous studies focus on formal schools, public education institutions, or universities, while Islamic boarding schools remain relatively underexplored within educational management research (Hasibuan, 2022). Existing studies also tend to examine organizational culture, transformational leadership, and teacher performance as direct relationships without adequately investigating the mediating role of professionalism (Abdelwahed *et al.*, 2025). In addition, empirical findings regarding the direct effect of transformational leadership on teacher performance remain inconsistent. Several studies report significant positive effects, whereas others reveal weak or insignificant relationships depending on institutional context and organizational characteristics (Prasetyo and Fadhilah, 2022). These inconsistencies indicate the need for a more comprehensive explanatory framework capable of clarifying how leadership influence is translated into performance outcomes. This study addresses these limitations by positioning professionalism as a mediating variable within the relationship between organizational culture, transformational leadership, and asatidz performance in Islamic boarding schools. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of organizational behavior perspectives with the socio-religious context of pesantren education, particularly by explaining professionalism as a strategic mechanism linking institutional culture and transformational leadership to educator performance.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to examine the direct and indirect effects of organizational culture and transformational leadership on asatidz performance through professionalism as a mediating variable in Islamic boarding schools. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to educational management literature by extending the application of organizational behavior theory within faith-based educational institutions. Practically, this study may provide an empirical foundation for Islamic boarding school leaders in developing institutional culture, strengthening professional development programs, and implementing leadership strategies capable of improving educator performance sustainably. The study also offers a conceptual framework for strengthening human resource quality in Islamic boarding schools amid increasing demands for educational accountability and institutional competitiveness.

METHOD

Research design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a correlational survey design and Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The study examined the direct and indirect relationships among organizational culture, transformational leadership, professionalism, and asatidz performance in Islamic boarding schools. PLS-SEM was selected because the proposed model involved multidimensional latent constructs and mediating relationships requiring simultaneous estimation of measurement and structural models. In addition, PLS-SEM is appropriate for prediction-oriented research,

accommodates moderate sample sizes, and does not require strict multivariate normality assumptions (Hair et al., 2022).

The study modeled all latent variables as higher-order constructs using a reflective-reflective hierarchical component model. Organizational culture, transformational leadership, professionalism, and *asatidz* performance each consisted of four constitutive dimensions. To estimate the multidimensional model accurately, the study applied the disjoint two-stage approach recommended for Higher-Order Construct (HOC) analysis in PLS-SEM (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS 4, while preliminary instrument testing was performed using JASP.

Population and sample

The population comprised all permanent *asatidz* serving in Islamic boarding schools located in Ciomas District, Indonesia. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, *asatidz* refers to Islamic educators who are responsible for religious instruction, character development, mentoring, and daily educational supervision within the *pesantren* environment. The study included only *asatidz* who had served for at least one year to ensure adequate exposure to organizational culture and leadership practices within their institutions.

The total population consisted of 247 *asatidz* distributed across several Islamic boarding schools. The sample size was determined using the Lemeshow formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, resulting in a minimum requirement of 150 respondents. Sampling was conducted using proportionate stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation across *pesantren* strata with different population sizes.

The final sample of 150 respondents also satisfied the minimum sample requirements for PLS-SEM analysis based on the 10-times rule and statistical power recommendations (Barclay et al., 1995; Hair et al., 2022). Empirical studies examining organizational culture, leadership, professionalism, and performance commonly report medium-to-large structural effects; therefore, the sample size was considered sufficient to estimate the proposed structural model reliably.

Variables and measurement

The study involved four latent constructs: organizational culture as the first exogenous variable, transformational leadership as the second exogenous variable, professionalism as the mediating variable, and *asatidz* performance as the endogenous variable. All constructs were operationalized as multidimensional reflective constructs measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree" or "never") to 5 ("strongly agree" or "always"). Table 1 presents the dimensions of each construct used in the study.

Table 1. Variables and construct dimensions

Variables	Dimensions
Organizational culture	Religious education, communal life, traditions and rituals, religious activities
Transformational leadership	Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration
Professionalism	Professional commitment, professional ethics and responsibility, professional autonomy, continuous

	professional development
Asatidz performance	Work quality, work quantity, work effectiveness, work efficiency

Instrument validation and reliability

The research instrument consisted of closed-ended questionnaire items developed from the theoretical dimensions of each construct. Prior to the main survey, the instrument underwent content validation, pilot testing, and construct evaluation. Content validity was assessed using the Content Validity Index involving experts in Islamic education and educational management. Of the initial 160 items developed across four variables, 159 items met the minimum content validity threshold and were retained for pilot testing. Pilot testing was subsequently conducted on 30 asatidz outside the main sample. Item validity was examined using Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis. Items with p-values below 0.05 were retained, while invalid items were eliminated. Following the pilot test, the instrument retained 28 items for asatidz performance, 24 items for organizational culture, 27 items for transformational leadership, and 28 items for professionalism. Reliability analysis using Cronbach’s alpha demonstrated strong internal consistency across all constructs. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from 0.878 to 0.946, exceeding the recommended minimum threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). These findings indicated that the instrument possessed satisfactory reliability and was suitable for the main data collection process. Construct validation in the main analysis was conducted through outer model evaluation in PLS-SEM. Indicators with outer loading values below 0.50 were removed from the final model, while indicators with loading values between 0.50 and 0.70 were retained when composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) remained acceptable (Hair et al., 2022).

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed in several stages using SmartPLS 4. The first stage involved evaluating the measurement model to assess convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal consistency reliability. The second stage evaluated the structural model by examining collinearity, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), predictive relevance (Q^2), and model fit. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. Direct and indirect effects were evaluated using path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, and confidence intervals. The mediating role of professionalism was assessed using specific indirect effect analysis and interpreted based on the mediation typology proposed by Zhao et al. (2010). Table 2 summarizes the evaluation criteria applied in the PLS-SEM analysis.

Table 2. PLS-SEM evaluation criteria

Evaluation aspect	Threshold
Outer loading	≥ 0.70
Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	≥ 0.50
Composite Reliability	≥ 0.70
Cronbach’s alpha	≥ 0.70
HTMT ratio	< 0.85

Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)	< 5.00
R ²	0.25 = weak; 0.50 = moderate; 0.75 = substantial
Effect size (f ²)	0.02 = small; 0.15 = medium; 0.35 = large
Predictive relevance (Q ²)	> 0
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	< 0.08
t-statistic	> 1.96
p-value	< 0.05

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The respondents consisted of 150 asatidz from several pesantren institutions. Most respondents had 1–2 years of teaching service (41.33%), followed by 3–5 years (35.33%), 6–8 years (15.33%), and more than 8 years (8.00%). The distribution indicates that the respondents generally possessed adequate experience in evaluating pesantren organizational culture, transformational leadership, professionalism, and asatidz performance. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the research variables.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Asatidz Performance	97.97	15.114	64	125
Pesantren Organizational Culture	79.92	11.212	52	99
Transformational Leadership	98.38	13.100	65	119
Professionalism	99.59	15.277	68	126

Professionalism obtained the highest mean score, indicating that respondents generally perceived themselves as having strong professional attitudes and behaviors. Pesantren Organizational Culture showed the lowest standard deviation, reflecting relatively homogeneous perceptions among respondents.

The measurement model evaluation demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability across all constructs. Indicators with outer loadings below 0.50 were removed from the final model. The remaining indicators achieved acceptable convergent validity, with AVE values exceeding 0.50 and outer loadings generally above 0.70.

Table 4. Measurement Model Evaluation

Construct	AVE	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
Pesantren Organizational Culture	0.660	0.894	0.894
Transformational Leadership	0.690	0.902	0.902

Professionalism	0.705	0.878	0.878
Asatidz Performance	0.707	0.946	0.946

The measurement model evaluation demonstrated satisfactory convergent validity and internal consistency reliability. All AVE values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity. In addition, Composite Reliability and Cronbach’s Alpha values for all constructs were above 0.70, confirming that the constructs possessed satisfactory internal consistency reliability.

The overall model fit was evaluated using several goodness-of-fit indices in PLS-SEM, including SRMR, d_ULS, d_G, Chi-square, and NFI. The results of the model fit assessment are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Model Fit Indices

Index	Saturated Model	Estimated Model	Threshold & Interpretation
SRMR	0.062	0.062	< 0.08 (good fit)
d_ULS	0.524	0.524	Supportive fit index
d_G	0.242	0.242	Supportive fit index
Chi-square	214.318	214.318	Not emphasized in PLS-SEM
NFI	0.837	0.837	Acceptable fit

The SRMR value of 0.062 was below the recommended threshold of 0.08, indicating good model fit. The d_ULS value of 0.524 and d_G value of 0.242 also supported the adequacy of the model estimation. In addition, the NFI value of 0.837 indicated an acceptable level of fit for PLS-SEM analysis. Overall, the model demonstrated satisfactory goodness-of-fit and was considered appropriate for hypothesis testing.

The overall structural relationships among variables were further summarized by comparing the magnitude, significance, and mediation type of each hypothesized effect. Table 6 presents the ranking of direct and indirect effects based on their standardized path coefficients.

Table 6. Summary of Hypothesis Testing and Effect Type

Rank	Path Relationship	Coefficient (β)	t-value	Sig. (p)	Effect Type
1	Professionalism → Asatidz Performance	0.505	6.742	<0.001	Direct Significant
2	Pesantren Organizational Culture → Professionalism	0.378	4.981	<0.001	Direct Significant
3	Transformational Leadership → Professionalism	0.307	3.428	0.001	Direct Significant

4	Pesantren Organizational Culture → Asatidz Performance	0.261	3.915	<0.001	Direct Significant
5	Transformational Leadership → Asatidz Performance	0.114	1.661	0.097	Direct Insignificant
6	Pesantren Organizational Culture → Professionalism → Asatidz Performance	0.191	3.876	<0.001	Complementary Partial Mediation
7	Transformational Leadership → Professionalism → Asatidz Performance	0.155	3.114	0.002	Full Mediation

Table 6 and figure 1 shows that Professionalism had the strongest direct effect on Asatidz Performance ($\beta = 0.505, p < 0.001$), indicating that higher professionalism substantially improved the performance of asatidz. Pesantren Organizational Culture and Transformational Leadership both had significant positive effects on Professionalism, with organizational culture demonstrating a stronger contribution.

Pesantren Organizational Culture also directly affected Asatidz Performance significantly, whereas Transformational Leadership did not show a significant direct effect on performance ($\beta = 0.114, p = 0.097$). However, Transformational Leadership significantly influenced Asatidz Performance indirectly through Professionalism, indicating a full mediation pattern. In contrast, the indirect effect of Pesantren Organizational Culture through Professionalism represented complementary partial mediation because both the direct and indirect effects were significant. Overall, the findings highlight Professionalism as the central mechanism linking organizational and leadership factors to Asatidz Performance.



Figure 1. Summary of Hypothesis Testing and Effect Type

The findings of this study demonstrate that professionalism is the most influential factor affecting Asatidz Performance in pesantren institutions. The strong positive effect of professionalism indicates that performance improvement among asatidz depends largely on professional commitment, ethical responsibility, professional autonomy, and continuous self-development (Syauqi *et al.*, 2025; Ayumi and Nasution, 2025). This result reinforces the argument that educator professionalism is a critical determinant of educational quality and institutional effectiveness (Sanafiri, 2024). Previous studies have similarly reported that professional competence and commitment contribute significantly to teacher performance and instructional effectiveness (Alwi *et al.*, 2023; Masnawati and Darmawan, 2022). The present study extends these findings into the pesantren context, where professionalism operates not only as an administrative requirement but also as a reflection of moral and religious responsibility (Hamka, 2023).

Pesantren Organizational Culture was found to have significant direct and indirect effects on Asatidz Performance. The direct effect suggests that a strong pesantren culture characterized by religious values, communal traditions, discipline, and collective activities directly shapes work behavior and performance outcomes. At the same time, the indirect effect through Professionalism indicates that organizational culture also functions by strengthening professional attitudes and behaviors among asatidz. This finding is consistent with organizational culture theory, which emphasizes that shared values and norms influence employee attitudes, commitment, and performance (Isa *et al.*, 2024; Zaini *et al.*, 2023; Idris *et al.*, 2022). Several previous studies also reported that organizational culture positively affects teacher professionalism and organizational performance (Rostini *et al.*, 2022). However, this study specifically highlights the unique role of pesantren culture as a value-based educational environment that integrates religious, social, and professional dimensions simultaneously.

Another important finding is that Transformational Leadership did not directly influence Asatidz Performance. Although the relationship showed a positive direction, the effect was statistically insignificant. This result differs from many previous studies that identified transformational leadership as a direct predictor of employee or teacher performance (Zaini *et al.*, 2023; Nurulloh *et al.*, 2020). Nevertheless, the present findings suggest that within the pesantren context, inspirational leadership alone is insufficient to improve performance unless it first enhances the professionalism of asatidz. This interpretation is strengthened by the significant indirect effect of Transformational Leadership through Professionalism, which demonstrated a full mediation pattern (Atsyaury *et al.*, 2023).

The full mediation finding indicates that Professionalism acts as the primary mechanism connecting leadership practices with performance outcomes. Transformational leadership becomes effective only when it successfully develops professional values, responsibility, and self-development among asatidz. This finding supports mediation-based leadership models emphasizing that leadership affects performance indirectly through

psychological and behavioral mechanisms (Riani and Ain, 2022). Compared with prior studies that mostly found partial mediation effects (Estiani and Hasanah, 2022), the current study reveals a stronger dependency on professionalism within pesantren institutions. This condition may be influenced by the distinctive characteristics of pesantren, where moral authority and professional conduct are more important than formal managerial influence alone (Zhang *et al.*, 2020).

Overall, the study highlights that improving Asatidz Performance requires an integrated strategy involving the strengthening of pesantren organizational culture, the implementation of transformational leadership practices, and the development of professionalism as the central performance mechanism. The findings contribute to the literature on educational management and Islamic boarding school governance by providing empirical evidence that professionalism is the key pathway through which organizational and leadership factors influence educator performance in pesantren settings.

CONCLUSIONS

This study confirms that Professionalism is the strongest determinant of Asatidz Performance in pesantren institutions. Pesantren Organizational Culture significantly influenced both Professionalism and Asatidz Performance, indicating that a strong organizational culture directly and indirectly improves performance through the enhancement of professionalism. Transformational Leadership significantly affected Professionalism but did not directly influence Asatidz Performance. Its effect became significant only through Professionalism, indicating a full mediation pattern.

The findings demonstrate that improving Asatidz Performance requires not only supportive organizational culture and leadership practices, but also the strengthening of professionalism as the main mechanism driving performance improvement. These results reinforce the strategic importance of professional development for asatidz within the pesantren educational environment.

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