

PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCIES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS: A CASE STUDY AT TUNAS HARAPAN KINDERGARTEN, KAMPAR

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Abstract

The professionalism of Early Childhood Education teachers is a crucial aspect that determines the quality of educational services at the most fundamental stage in human life. This research departs from the importance of strengthening the professional competence of PAUD teachers as the key to creating quality learning. The focus of this research is to examine how teachers' professional abilities, learning implementation, and forms of self-development have been carried out by teachers. This study aims to analyze the professionalism of PAUD teachers in Tunas Harapan Kampar Kindergarten based on national standards and factual conditions in order to improve the pedagogic competence of PAUD teachers. The method used is a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study type. Data collection techniques include interviews, direct observations, and documentation studies, then analyzed through an interactive analysis model. The findings of the study revealed that teachers' professional competence is still not optimal, especially in terms of mastery of teaching materials, the application of varied learning strategies, and the use of media that supports children's creativity. Nevertheless, teachers still show responsibility in teaching. In addition, professional development activities such as training and workshops are still limited so they do not fully support the improvement of teacher competence. The results of this study confirm that improving teachers' professional competence needs to be the main concern to encourage the quality of education at Tunas Harapan Kampar Kindergarten.

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such as training and workshops are still limited and therefore do not fully support the improvement of teacher competence. The results of this study confirm that improving teacher professional competence needs to be a primary concern to improve the quality of education at Tunas Harapan Kampar Kindergarten.

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INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government has issued various regulations to regulate the standards and competencies of PAUD teachers, including Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, Government Regulation Number 19 of 2005 concerning National Education Standards, Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 137 of 2014 concerning National Standards for Early Childhood Education, Regulation of the Director General of Teachers and Education Personnel of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 2626/B/Hk.04.01/2023 concerning teacher competency models (Cultural Education, 2023). These regulations explicitly stipulate four competencies that every teacher must have, namely pedagogical, personality, social, and professional competencies.

The age of 0-6 years is a golden period where brain development occurs very rapidly, so providing stimulation in the form of education is an important foundation that can shape a child's character, intelligence, and personality (Hadisi, 2015). The quality of stimulation and educational services received by children during this phase will have a long-term impact on their future success (Grashinta et al., 2025). As the main facilitator of learning, early childhood education teachers are required to have comprehensive competencies including a deep understanding of child development, the ability to design and implement meaningful learning, and the ability to build positive relationships with children, parents, and the community (Jamain et al., 2025).

The problem that arises is that although regulations have been clearly established, implementation is still far from expectations. Data from the Ministry of Education and Culture shows that a significant percentage of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers still do not have a Bachelor's (S1) or Diploma IV education qualification, which is the minimum requirement according to

regulations (Novellyandra & Saputri, 2025). This condition is exacerbated by the low welfare of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers, especially in private and rural institutions, which impacts teacher motivation and commitment to improving their professionalism. The quality of early childhood education (PAUD) services is highly dependent on the competence and professionalism of teachers as the spearhead of learning implementation (Amanda, 2026).

Based on this background, the aim of this study is to describe the professionalism of PAUD teachers at Tunas Harapan Kampar Kindergarten based on national standards and factual conditions in an effort to improve the pedagogical competence of PAUD teachers.

METHODOLOGY

This research applies a qualitative approach with a case study. A qualitative case study approach is an empirical inquiry that investigates phenomena within a real-life context, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and multiple sources of evidence are utilized (Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023). This research aims to examine in-depth the professional competence of PAUD teachers in real-life situations. With this approach, researchers can understand how teachers carry out their professional duties in direct learning activities in the field. Meanwhile, the case study was chosen so that the research could focus on one institution specifically, so that the results obtained are detailed and in accordance with real conditions. The research was conducted at Tunas Harapan Kindergarten. This location was chosen based on the consideration that the institution has relevant conditions for research, especially in terms of the application of teacher pedagogical competence in teaching and learning activities. The research was conducted in March 2026.

The research subjects involved two early childhood education teachers and one principal, totaling three people. Informants were selected using a saturated sampling technique. *Sampling Saturation* is a sampling technique where all members of the population are included (Raden & Lampung, 2015). The criteria used were teachers who had taught for at least three years and a principal who understood the conditions and management of the institution. One of the key informants was a teacher with considerable teaching experience, able to provide in-depth information.

Data collection was conducted using three techniques: interviews, observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to

obtain information regarding teachers' understanding and application of professional competencies. Observations involved directly observing the learning process and interactions between teachers and students. Documentation, such as learning materials and school administration data, served as supporting data.

In this study, the researcher acted as the primary instrument, directly collecting and analyzing data. To support this process, interview guidelines and observation sheets were used to ensure the data remained aligned with the research focus. Data analysis employed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (Miles et al., 2014), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was achieved by filtering and selecting relevant data. Data presentation was organized descriptively for ease of understanding. Conclusions were then drawn based on the interpretation of the analyzed data. Data validity was verified through triangulation, comparing data obtained from various data collection techniques, such as interviews and documentation. Furthermore, interview results were reconfirmed with informants to ensure the data obtained was accurate and reliable.

In line with the opinions of Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, the data analysis in the book *Basics of Qualitative Research* is a systematic process for interpreting qualitative data with the aim of building a theory based on the data (*grounded theory*). This process is carried out simultaneously with data collection through the coding stage, namely *open coding* to identify concepts, *axial coding* to connect categories, and *selective coding* to organize core categories into a coherent theory. Furthermore, analysis was conducted through continuous comparison, memo writing, and developing relationships between concepts. Thus, data analysis is not only descriptive, but also inductive, creative, and aims to produce a theory that is in line with reality and can be understood and applied (Strauss & Corbin, 2001). Through this approach, the research is expected to provide a clear and in-depth picture of the professional competence of PAUD teachers at Tunas Harapan Kindergarten in accordance with actual conditions in the field. The following is an interview instrument with Tunas Harapan Kindergarten teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Early Childhood Education Teacher Competency Standards in National Regulations

Act or standard This involves conducting a comprehensive evaluation of program implementation and the achievement of learning quality targets. Evaluation results are used as recommendations for corrective action. If standards are running well and being met, they are then increased. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary, a standard is a specific measurement used as a benchmark (Puspitasari, 2017). Professional standards for early childhood education (PAUD) teachers refer to the professional values, professional knowledge, and professional skills that teachers must possess in carrying out educational tasks. Teachers play a key role in improving educational quality and must therefore meet the professional standards set by the government (Eliza et al., 2022).

Regarding educational qualifications, the 2005 Teacher and Lecturer Law requires PAUD teachers to have a minimum academic qualification of a Bachelor's degree (S1) or Diploma Four (D-IV) in early childhood education or psychology (Nurhayati & Rakhman, 2017). First, pedagogical competence includes an understanding of the characteristics, potential, and needs of early childhood, the ability to design educational development activities, the implementation of development activities that cover physical motoric, cognitive, language, social emotional, artistic, and moral-religious aspects, and the ability to assess child development. Second, personality competence includes acting in accordance with Indonesian religious, legal, social, and cultural norms, presenting oneself as an honest person, with noble morals, and a role model for children and society, and presenting oneself as a steady, stable, mature, wise, and authoritative person. This personality competence is an important foundation because PAUD teachers not only act as educators, but also as figures who serve as role models for children during their development (Suyadi & Ulfah, 2022). Third, based on Permendiknas No. Law No. 16 of 2007 states that social competence encompasses the ability to communicate and interact effectively with children, parents, fellow educators, education personnel, and the community. This competence is crucial given the holistic, integrative nature of early childhood education, involving multi-stakeholder collaboration. Fourth, professional competence encompasses mastery of material, structures, concepts, and scientific mindsets that support early childhood development, mastery of competency standards and basic competencies in the development field, and continuous professional development.

As professional educators, PAUD teachers are required to possess academic qualifications, competencies, a teaching certificate, be physically and mentally

healthy, and possess the ability to achieve national education goals. Professional competence relates to the ability to understand the stages of child development and growth, the ability to provide educational stimulation, care, and protection, and the ability to build collaboration with parents in the education, care, and protection of children (Roza et al., 2020). Teacher professional competence is crucial in determining the quality of learning in PAUD. Teachers with strong professional competence are able to develop creative, educational, and developmental learning activities that are appropriate to the child's developmental stage. Therefore, training and professional development are essential to improving the quality of PAUD teachers (Novitasari & Fitria, 2021). Furthermore, improving teachers' academic qualifications also impacts their professional competence in implementing classroom learning. Teachers with strong professional competence are able to establish effective communication and create quality learning (Wulandari & Rahma, 2023).

2. Factual Conditions of Early Childhood Education Teacher Professionalism at Tunas Harapan Kindergarten

Early childhood education (ECE) is a level of education that plays a role in optimizing children's development in religious and moral values, physical motor skills, cognitive skills, language skills, social skills, emotional skills, and values (Kalsum et al., 2023). The success of ECE (Early Childhood Education) programs is greatly influenced by the quality of teachers, the primary implementers of the learning process. Therefore, teachers are required to possess adequate competencies, particularly pedagogical and professional competencies.

Pedagogical competence is a teacher's ability to understand student characteristics, design learning, implement learning processes appropriate to children's developmental stages, and conduct learning evaluations. Meanwhile, professional competence relates to mastery of subject matter, the ability to develop learning media, and continuous self-development. These two competencies are fundamental to creating active, creative, and meaningful learning for early childhood.

However, various studies indicate that the competence of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers still faces several challenges. Rahmawati and Kurniati (2022) found that teachers' understanding of the competency-based curriculum and the holistic-integrative approach still needs improvement. Furthermore, teachers' ability to systematically observe and document child development is also suboptimal. Research by Sholeh (2023) shows that teacher motivation influences competency

development efforts, with motivated teachers tending to be more active in participating in training and implementing learning innovations. Meanwhile, Gella et al. (2025) found that access to training workshops and professional learning communities positively contributed to improving the competence of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers.

Similar issues were encountered at Tunas Harapan Kindergarten in Kampar. Observations showed that teachers had used learning media in their teaching activities, but these were still rudimentary and had not yet utilized digital technology optimally. From a pedagogical perspective, learning was still dominated by assignments, coloring, and copying. Furthermore, teachers' creativity in developing learning media was also limited. The media used tended to lack variety and did not utilize the potential of the surrounding environment as a learning resource.

This situation is believed to be influenced by limited training opportunities, a lack of professional development, and suboptimal institutional support in the form of academic supervision and provision of learning facilities. If this situation persists, the quality of early childhood education services could potentially suffer. Therefore, an in-depth study of early childhood education teacher competencies is needed as a basis for formulating efforts to improve the quality of learning at Tunas Harapan Kindergarten, Kampar.

3. The Gap between Ideal Standards and Real Conditions

A comparative analysis of regulatory standards and actual conditions reveals a significant gap. This gap can be categorized into several dimensions: (1) a qualification gap, where many teachers still do not meet the minimum educational requirements; (2) a competency gap, where there is a difference between the competencies that should be mastered and those actually practiced; and (3) a welfare gap, which affects teachers' ability and motivation to develop. The qualification gap is a structural issue rooted in the historical development of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) in Indonesia. In the early days of PAUD, many institutions were established by the community with only a limited number of teaching staff, without clear qualification requirements. The gap in curriculum implementation is also a serious concern. Although the Independent Curriculum for PAUD has been launched, many teachers do not fully understand the philosophy and learning approaches adopted by the curriculum. Research (Elok et al., 2023) identified that teachers' understanding of the concepts of independent play and

independent learning in the PAUD context still needs to be deepened, particularly regarding the implementation of project-based learning and child portfolios.

Based on the results of the interviews conducted, it can be seen that the pedagogical competence of PAUD teachers has generally been implemented well. Teachers have a fairly good understanding of the basic concepts of early childhood education, which emphasize the importance of learning through play activities and the development of all aspects of child development, such as cognitive, language, social-emotional, motor, and religious values. In addition, teachers are also able to adapt learning materials to the age and developmental stage of the child by referring to established developmental indicators. In terms of learning development, teachers have systematically designed learning activities through the preparation of lesson plans. Teachers also utilize various learning media, both media made independently from simple materials and media available at the school. Learning evaluation is carried out through observations of children's activities and development, and recording the results of the assessment in the form of observation sheets and child development notes. This is as expressed by Mrs. H, a teacher:

"I implement child-centered learning. I primarily use role-playing, storytelling, simple experiments, and small group projects. The goal is to get children actively involved, not just sitting around listening. I also use a thematic approach, so all activities within a theme are interconnected, making it easier for children to grasp the concepts."

In terms of technology utilization, teachers have used simple technologies such as laptops, projectors, and mobile phones to support learning activities, for example, in showing educational videos and searching for learning activity references. Furthermore, teachers have demonstrated efforts to develop professional competencies through participation in training and workshops organized by relevant institutions. Teachers' understanding of the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) curriculum is also quite good, demonstrated by their ability to develop theme-based and child-centered learning activities. In assessing child development, teachers use various assessment techniques such as observation, checklists, anecdotal notes, and portfolios of children's work. If deficiencies are identified in the learning process, teachers conduct reflections and discuss with colleagues to improve future learning activities. Overall, it can be seen that the professional competencies of PAUD teachers have been implemented quite well, although continuous improvement is still needed through training, technology utilization, and

the development of more innovative learning methods to optimize the quality of learning.

4. Efforts to Improve the Pedagogical Competence of Early Childhood Education Teachers

Various efforts have been made to improve the pedagogical competence of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers, both by the government and professional organizations. The Teacher Professional Education Program, designed for PAUD teachers, is a strategic step to improve competence and provide formal recognition for the PAUD teaching profession. Through this program, teachers receive in-depth pedagogical material, supervised teaching practice, and a teacher certificate, which is a requirement for obtaining a professional allowance (Florentinus Minarta, 2020).

Digital platforms are also increasingly playing a role in supporting the professional development of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers, such as Merdeka Mengajar (Teaching Freedom), Platform Guru Belajar dan Berbagi (Teaching and Sharing Platform), and various other educational applications that provide access to learning materials, training videos, and virtual learning communities that teachers can access anytime and anywhere. Research (Tobondo & Putra, 2023) shows that the use of digital platforms significantly improves the knowledge and skills of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers, especially in facing the challenges of learning in the post-pandemic era. The role of the Indonesian Association of Early Childhood Educators and Education Personnel (HIMPAUDI) and the Indonesian Kindergarten Teachers Association (IGTKI) in organizing training, seminars, and professional forums also contributes significantly to increasing the capacity of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers. These professional organizations serve as platforms for sharing experiences, learning innovations, and developing important professional networks for early childhood education (PAUD) educators (Syarifudin, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Competency standards for early childhood education (PAUD) teachers in Indonesia have been comprehensively formulated through various national regulations, encompassing four core competencies: pedagogical, personality, social, and professional. However, the implementation of these standards still faces serious, multidimensional challenges. The gap between ideal standards and actual conditions

is manifested in the low formal educational qualifications of some teachers, limited access to professional development programs, minimal economic incentives, and the unequal distribution of educational resources between urban and rural areas. These conditions require a comprehensive and systemic policy response.

Recommendations that can be presented from this study include: (1) accelerating the educational qualification fulfillment program through scholarships and RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) programs for experienced PAUD teachers, (2) strengthening the continuous professional development system through effective PAUD KKG and the use of digital technology, (3) improving the welfare system for non-ASN PAUD teachers through a more equitable government assistance scheme, (4) strengthening the role of supervisors and principals as supervisors and mentors for PAUD teachers, and (5) simplifying PAUD teacher certification procedures without reducing the expected competency standards. Improving the professionalism of PAUD teachers is not just a regulatory obligation, but a national strategic investment whose impact will be felt in the long term through the birth of the nation's next generation who are qualified, have character, and are competent to face future challenges.

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