

Principals' Professional Competency in Increasing Teacher Performance in State Kindergartens of Tebo Regency, Jambi Province

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Abstract: The success of managing Early Childhood Education (ECE) services during the golden age is highly determined by the effectiveness of school leadership and teacher performance in the classroom. However, empirical phenomena show that there are still challenges regarding teachers' pedagogical qualifications and school principals' focus, which tends to be trapped in administrative compliance rather than instructional supervision. This study aims to examine and analyze the effect of school principals' professional competency on teacher performance in State Kindergartens (TK Negeri) in Tebo Regency, Jambi Province. This study used a quantitative approach with a causal-associative design. The study population included all school principals and teachers at State Kindergartens in Tebo Regency, totaling 42 people. Sampling was carried out using a total sampling technique (census) so that the entire population served as respondents. Primary data collection utilized a structured questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale that had been tested for validity and reliability. Data analysis included descriptive tests, classical assumption tests (normality and linearity), simple linear regression, t-tests, and the coefficient of determination. The results showed that the principals' professional competency and teacher performance were both in the high category. The simple regression test yielded the equation $Y = 18.421 + 0.756X$, indicating a positive directional relationship. Hypothesis testing (t-test) obtained a calculated value of $12.504 < t_{table} (2.021)$ with a significance value of $0.000 < 0.05$, meaning that the school principals' professional competency has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance. The Coefficient of Determination (R^2) value of 0.799 indicates that 79.9% of the variation in teacher performance is determined by the principal's professional competency, while the remaining 20.1% is influenced by external factors. In conclusion, the principal's professional competency serves as the main driver in boosting the effectiveness and performance of State Kindergarten teachers in Tebo Regency. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of strengthening principals' managerial and supervisory capacity to support the overall quality of early childhood education services.

Keywords: Professional Competency, School Principal, Teacher Performance, Early Childhood Education, State Kindergarten

A. Introduction

Education is the main pillar of a nation's development, functioning as a medium for character building, morality, and human resource quality enhancement. A nation's success in facing global dynamics heavily depends on the quality of education provided (Karuru et al., 2024). This is in line with Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which emphasizes the importance of developing students' potential to become faithful and pious human beings (Machali & Hidayat, 2018). The primary foundation of character building begins at the Early Childhood Education (ECE/PAUD) or Kindergarten (TK) level. During this golden age, children's growth and development occur rapidly, so managing educational services at this level requires high professionalism to run optimally.

In the school management structure, the principal holds a strategic role as a leader who determines the direction and quality of learning (Suheri, 2025). The principal acts as the main driver responsible for creating a conducive working atmosphere and improving the professionalism of educators (Safitri, 2021; Selvia et al., 2024). Without clear leadership, schools will struggle to achieve their vision. Furthermore, Jeka et al. (2024) state that the implementation of management functions (planning, organizing, actuating, controlling) by school principals directly influences the improvement of teachers' performance quality in schools.

The professional competency of the principal is closely related to teacher performance (Syafarina et al., 2021). Teachers with superior performance are able to plan learning systematically, carry out engaging educational interactions, and conduct in-depth learning evaluations. Developing teacher performance requires guidance and direction from leadership. Findings by Saputra et al. (2025) reinforce this by showing that school leadership triggers teacher work effectiveness through periodic supervision and coaching. This aligns with research by Firmansyah et al. (2025), proving that effective leadership contributes positively to enhancing teachers' pedagogical and personal competencies.

Nevertheless, the extent and mechanisms of the principal's leadership impact on teacher performance remain a topic of continuous scientific discourse. Previous empirical literature exhibits notable discrepancies regarding the relative strength of school leadership versus internal teacher factors. For instance, Khadijah et al. (2022) found that academic qualifications and teacher certification exert a more dominant influence on teachers' teaching competency compared to school leadership variables. On the other hand, Mardiana et al. (2024) demonstrated that the principal's managerial competency has a significantly greater impact than external supervisory roles. Crucially, most existing studies have focused on primary, secondary, or urban education settings, where administrative infrastructure and teacher qualification levels are relatively homogeneous. There remains a significant empirical gap concerning how a principal's professional competency operates in Early Childhood Education (ECE) units—specifically in rural or developing regions such as Tebo Regency, Jambi Province, where ECE institutions frequently face resource constraints and unique pedagogical demands.

From an Islamic perspective, school leadership is viewed as a trust (al-imamah) that will be held accountable before Allah SWT. The word of Allah SWT in Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 30 confirms the position of humans as vicegerents (khalifah) on earth who are tasked with managing life with justice and responsibility. In addition, Surah An-Nisa [4]: 59 reminds us of the importance of obeying Allah, the Messenger, and ulil amri (Ministry of Religious Affairs RI, 2019). In carrying out their duties, principals should ideally internalize the four main attributes of the Prophet Muhammad SAW: siddiq (truthfulness), amanah (trustworthiness), tabligh (transparency/communication), and fathanah (wisdom/intelligence). By modeling these traits, leadership can create an ethics-based work climate that motivates teachers to work sincerely and professionally.

However, national realities show that improving the quality of early childhood education still faces various challenges. Data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2023) reveals that around 40% of ECE teachers in Indonesia have not met the bachelor's degree (S1) academic qualification. Furthermore, the results of the national Teacher Competency Assessment (AKG) for the ECE level in 2022 averaged below 55 on a scale of 100 (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This condition reflects the limited mastery of pedagogical competencies and professionalism among educators, directly impacting the lack of variety in teaching methods and suboptimal management of classroom teaching tools.

These national issues are highly relevant to the empirical conditions observed in State Kindergartens (TK Negeri) in Tebo Regency, Jambi Province. Initial observations show that teacher performance in this region remains varied and encounters several obstacles. Some teachers still face difficulties in designing developmentally appropriate curricula and creating communicative learning media for children. On the other hand, the principal's role as an instructional leader is not yet fully optimal because it is still dominated by formal administrative obligations, leaving routine academic coaching and supervision for teachers unfulfilled.

Addressing these empirical gaps is essential because early childhood education forms the bedrock of lifelong learning, requiring instructional leadership tailored to early childhood pedagogy. Therefore, this study aims to thoroughly test and analyze the effect of school principals' professional competency on teacher performance in State Kindergartens of Tebo Regency, Jambi Province. This scientific study is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of Islamic Education Management science while offering practical input for policy makers striving to enhance the quality and governance of early childhood education.

B. Methods

This study employed a quantitative approach with a causal-associative design aimed at testing and analyzing the effect of the independent variable, School Principal Professional Competency (X), on the dependent variable, Teacher Performance (Y). The quantitative approach was selected to yield objective and measurable empirical proof through statistical hypothesis testing (Sugiyono, 2019).

The research was conducted across all 10 State Kindergartens (TK Negeri) in Tebo Regency, Jambi Province. The target population encompassed all 42 personnel working within these units, consisting of 10 school principals and 32 teachers. Given the reachable and relatively small population size, sampling was conducted using a total sampling technique (census), where all population members participated in the study (Sumargo, 2020; Sumargo et al., 2024)

To ensure data validity and avoid potential self-assessment bias (where principals might overestimate their own competency or evaluate their own performance within the same dataset), a clear unit of analysis and data collection structure was established:

1. Evaluation of Principal Professional Competency (*X*): Assessed by the 32 teachers, who provided objective ratings regarding their respective principals' managerial, supervisory, and operational competencies. The scores from teachers within each school unit were aggregated to reflect the principal's competency score.
2. Evaluation of Teacher Performance (*Y*): Measured through a cross-verified evaluation mechanism combining teacher self-reports with performance evaluations conducted by the 10 school principals using standardized rubrics for learning design, execution, and assessment.

The Principal Professional Competency variable (*X*) refers to technical ability, managerial leadership, and pedagogical understanding in managing and fostering the educational unit. Meanwhile, the Teacher Performance variable (*Y*) is defined as the work results achieved in terms of quality and quantity by educators in planning, executing, and evaluating learning. Both variables were measured using a structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The operationalization details of the research variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Operationalization of Research Variables

Variable	Indicators	Measurement Scale
Principal Professional Competency (<i>X</i>)	1. Ability to formulate school program planning. 2. Management of school organization and resources. 3. Execution of academic and instructional supervision. 4. Evaluation and monitoring of institutional performance.	Likert Scale (1–5)
Teacher Performance (<i>Y</i>)	1. Instructional planning (RPPH/RPPM). 2. Execution of educational learning interactions. 3. Evaluation and assessment of child development. 4. Discipline and professional commitment.	Likert Scale (1–5)

Primary data collection techniques were carried out by distributing structured questionnaires to respondents. Prior to field data collection, the questionnaire instrument was first tested for validity and reliability on a trial sample outside the main population. The validity test used the *Pearson Product Moment* formula, where an item statement was declared valid if $r_{calculated} > r_{table}$ at a 5% significance level (Utami, 2023). Next, the reliability test was performed by calculating the *Cronbach's Alpha* coefficient; the instrument was deemed reliable if *Cronbach's Alpha* > 0,60 (Sitoayu et al., 2020). Table 2 presents the research instrument grid.

Primary data collection techniques were carried out by distributing structured questionnaires to respondents. Prior to field data collection, the questionnaire instrument was tested for validity and reliability on a trial sample of 20 ECE educators in a neighboring district possessing similar characteristics. The validity test used the *Pearson Product-Moment* formula, where an item statement was declared valid if $r_{calculated} > r_{table}$ (0.312) at a 5% significance level (Utami, 2023). Next, the reliability test was performed by calculating the *Cronbach's Alpha* coefficient; the instrument was deemed reliable if *Cronbach's Alpha* > 0.60 (Sitoayu et al., 2020). Table 2 presents the research instrument grid.

Table 2. Research Instrument Test Grid

Variable	Main Indicators	Item Numbers	Total Item
Professional Competency (X)	Planning & Organizing	1-10	10
	Academic Supervision	11-20	10
	Evaluation		
Teacher Performance (Y)	Intsructional Planning & Execution	1-10	10
	Evaluation & Professional Commitment	11-20	10

Data analysis techniques in this study included descriptive statistical analysis and inferential statistical analysis (Sugiyono, 2019). Descriptive statistics were used to describe frequency distributions, mean values, and respondent achievement levels. Before hypothesis testing, classical assumption tests were required, including normality tests (using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test) to ensure residuals were normally distributed, and linearity tests to confirm linear relationships between variables (Spiegel & Stephens, 1999). Once assumptions were met, hypothesis testing was conducted using Simple Linear Regression Analysis.

Simple linear regression is formulated as:

$$Y = a + bX + e$$

Where:

- Y = Teacher Performance
- a = Constant value
- b = Regression coefficient
- X = Principal Professional Competency

- e = Error term

Partial hypothesis testing was carried out using the t-test at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. If $t_{calculated} > t_{table}$ or $p\text{-value} < 0.05$, H_0 is rejected and H_a is accepted, indicating a significant influence of principal professional competency on teacher performance. Furthermore, the Coefficient of Determination (R^2) was calculated to assess the proportion of variance in variable Y explained by variable X .

C. Results and Discussion

This study analyzed the effect of school principal professional competency (X) on teacher performance (Y) in State Kindergartens (TK Negeri) in Tebo Regency, Jambi Province. Primary data were collected by distributing structured questionnaires to the entire target population of 42 respondents (10 principals and 32 teachers across State Kindergartens in Tebo Regency). Instrument testing confirmed that all 40 items had $r_{calculated} > 0,312$ (r_{table}) and Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.884 for variable X and 0.891 for variable Y , confirming high validity and reliability (Sitoayu et al., 2020).

Table 3. Descriptive Analysis of Research Variables

Research Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev	Achievement Level
Professional Competency (X)	42	68	98	84.26	7.12	High
Teacher Performance (Y)	42	65	96	82.14	7.85	High

Based on the descriptive analysis in Table 3, the mean score for Principal Professional Competency (X) was 84.26 out of a maximum score of 100. This achievement shows that, in general, managerial competency, instructional leadership, and academic supervision execution by state kindergarten principals in Tebo Regency are in the high category. The indicator with the highest average was school program planning, while the indicator needing improvement was the intensity and available time for personal academic supervision of teachers in classrooms.

Meanwhile, the average score for Teacher Performance (Y) reached 82.14, also categorized as high. This strong performance achievement is supported by indicators of teaching discipline and the ability to prepare daily lesson plans (RPPH/Modul Ajar). However, indicators regarding portfolio-based child development evaluation and the utilization of digital-based learning media scored the lowest on average. This signifies that although teachers' commitment to teaching is commendable, technology-based pedagogical innovation and authentic assessment techniques remain key areas requiring further coaching interventions.

Prior to regression analysis, classical assumption tests were conducted to ensure the validity of the estimation model (Rusdiana, 2025; Zaenuddin, 2020). The normality test of residuals using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov method produced an *Asymp. Sig. (2 – tailed)* value of 0.200. Because this significance value is greater than $\alpha = 0.05$, it can be concluded that residual data are normally distributed. Furthermore, the linearity test yielded a Deviation from Linearity value of 0.341 ($p > 0.05$), confirming that the relationship between principal professional competency and teacher performance is linear.

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression Analysis Results

Model	Unstandardized (<i>B</i>)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (β)	$t_{calculated}$	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	18.421	5.112	-	3.604	0.001
Professional Competency (<i>X</i>)	0.756	0.060	0.894	12.504	0.000

Hypothesis testing was conducted using simple linear regression analysis, with results presented in Table 4. The regression equation obtained from data analysis is:

$$Y = 18.421 + 0.756X$$

The constant value of 18.421 indicates that if the principal's professional competency score is zero, the baseline score of teacher performance in Tebo Regency State Kindergartens is estimated to remain at 18.421. The regression coefficient (b) of 0.756 is positive, meaning that every one-unit increase in the principal's professional competency score is associated with a 0.756-unit increase in the teacher performance score.

Partial hypothesis testing (t-test) yielded a $t_{calculated}$ value of 12.504, far exceeding the t_{table} value of 2.021 at a 5% significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$) and $df = 40$. Furthermore, the significance value was 0.000, well below the threshold of 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). These statistical results provide strong evidence to reject H_0 and accept H_a , confirming that school principals' professional competency has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance in State Kindergartens of Tebo Regency, Jambi Province.

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R^2) Results

Model	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> Square	Adjusted <i>R</i> Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.894	0.799	0.794	3.562

The extent of the variance in teacher performance explained by the principal's professional competency was measured through the Coefficient of Determination (R^2). Based on Table 5, the *R* Square value obtained is 0.799. This finding indicates that 79.9% of the variance in Teacher Performance (Y) in State Kindergartens of Tebo Regency can be explained by Principal Professional Competency (X). Meanwhile, the remaining 20.1% of the variation

is associated with other factors outside this research model, such as compensation levels, school organizational climate, personal academic qualifications, or teachers' emotional work environment. It should be noted that while $R^2 = 0.799$ indicates a strong statistical association, this cross-sectional finding reflects explanatory strength rather than absolute direct causation.

Analytically, the high statistical association of 79.9% demonstrates that at the early childhood/kindergarten level, the principal's leadership role is pivotal. Kindergarten teachers require constant direction, concrete teaching method guidance, and an emotionally safe work environment to manage young children. When principals demonstrate mature managerial competence—such as preparing class schedules effectively, designing regular supervision programs, and acting fairly—teacher performance in planning learning, evaluating children, and maintaining teaching discipline increases markedly. This finding reinforces studies by Hutasoit (2024) and Amelia et al. (2025), which assert that school leadership effectiveness is a primary determinant of educator performance standards in ECE institutions.

This empirical finding also resolves theoretical debates by strengthening the views of Amanda (2026), Aming et al. (2025), and Muttaqin et al. (2025), who emphasize that the principal's internal competency exerts a far more substantial impact on teacher performance than external supervision factors or formal qualification variables alone. In Tebo Regency State Kindergartens, direct coaching through clinical supervision and the principal's daily role modeling proved to be the primary catalyst transforming teachers' professional awareness into real classroom performance.

From an Islamic perspective, these research results reaffirm the concept of leadership as a trust (*al-imamah*) and instructional leadership. A professionally competent principal is essentially executing the function of a vicegerent (*khalifah*) (Surah Al-Baqarah [2]: 30) by managing school potential fairly and measurably. When principals apply the four prophetic traits—*siddiq* in evaluation transparency, *amanah* in fulfilling managerial duties, *tabligh* in communicating with and guiding teachers, and *fathanah* in resolving learning issues—a work culture rooted in obedience and sincerity is established (Surah An-Nisa [4]: 59).

Overall, these findings carry practical implications that efforts to improve kindergarten teacher performance in Tebo Regency cannot be done partially by only training teachers. Local Government and the Tebo Regency Education Office must prioritize managerial capacity building and leadership development programs for State Kindergarten principals. By continuously enhancing principals' professional competencies, systematic teacher coaching quality will be built, ultimately boosting the overall and sustainable quality of early childhood education services.

D. Conclusions

Based on data analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that school principals' professional competency has a positive and significant effect on teacher performance in State Kindergartens of Tebo Regency, Jambi Province. This is supported by the simple linear regression equation $Y = 18.421 + 0.756X$ and a $t_{calculated}$ value of 12.504, which is

significantly larger than t_{table} (2.021) with a significance value of $p = 0.000 < 0.05$. These findings indicate that higher professional competency possessed by principals—particularly in program planning, organizing, academic supervision, and institutional evaluation—is accompanied by higher teacher performance in planning, executing, and evaluating classroom learning processes.

Furthermore, the coefficient of determination analysis shows an R^2 value of 0.799, meaning that 79.9% of the statistical variance in teacher performance across Tebo Regency State Kindergartens is explained by the principal's professional competency, while the remaining 20.1% is influenced by other external factors outside the scope of this study. From an Islamic perspective, these findings reinforce the importance of leadership grounded in trust and prophetic values (*siddiq, amanah, tabligh, fathanah*), where the instructional leadership role of the principal serves as a primary engine in building a professional and ethical teacher work culture. Therefore, improving early childhood education service quality in Tebo Regency should focus on strengthening principals' managerial and supervisory capacities in a planned and sustainable manner.

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