

The principal's strategy in developing pedagogical professionalism of kindergarten teachers: a case study at tkit al-qur'an at-tartil, sukabumi city

Susi Widiyawati^{a,1*}, R. Supyan Sauri^{b,2}, Abdul Holik^{c,3}

^{a,b,c} Universitas Islam Nusantara Bandung, Indonesia

¹ susiwidiyawati75@gmail.com; ² uyunsupyan@uninus.ac.id; ³ abdulholik@uninus.ac.id

* susiwidiyawati75@gmail.com

Received: 13-04-2025

Revised: 24-05-2025

Accepted: 21-06-2025

KEYWORDS

Early childhood education, strategies to improve teacher pedagogical competence, teacher pedagogical professionalism

ABSTRACT

Early childhood education is the initial stage for developing the potential of children, who have unique characters. It requires treatment and educational strategies that suit their needs. Principals as leaders of early childhood education institutions need to ensure that teachers can carry out their duties professionally and are able to develop children's potential in all aspects of their development. The reality in the field shows that there are still various challenges in organizing kindergarten education, especially those related to the quality of the learning process. One important aspect that affects the quality of learning in kindergarten is the competence and professionalism of teachers. Faced with this fact, school principals can implement various strategies to develop teachers' pedagogical professionalism. Strategies to improve teachers' pedagogical competence must be integrated and sustainable. The purpose of this study is to analyze and describe the principal's strategy in developing kindergarten teachers' pedagogical professionalism. This research used a qualitative approach with a case study method. The research subjects were principals and teachers of TKIT Al-Qur'an At-Tartil in Sukabumi City. The results illustrate that principals make strategic efforts in developing teachers' pedagogical professionalism, starting from understanding the characteristics of students, mastering learning theories and principles, curriculum development, learning design, to implementing educational and dialogical learning. Principals carry out several strategies in developing teachers' pedagogical professionalism, including understanding the characteristics of learners, including physical, cognitive, social-emotional, moral, and spiritual aspects of early childhood, strengthening teachers' understanding of learning theories and principles in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood, as well as utilizing ICT, facilitating teachers in designing effective and enjoyable learning, starting from formulating goals, choosing strategies, methods, media, and learning resources that are in accordance with the characteristics of children.

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Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is a level of education provided to children from birth to six years of age. This education aims to provide stimulation for children's growth and

development holistically, including physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual aspects. One type of early childhood education service is kindergarten, which provides education for children aged 4-6 years (Hadi, 2009). In organizing education in kindergarten, a teacher plays an important role because it interacts directly with students. As the spearhead of early childhood education, kindergarten teachers are required to have adequate competencies, not only related to mastery of learning materials, but also the ability to design, implement, and evaluate the learning process (Hadi, 2009).

Early childhood education is the initial stage for the development of children's potential. Children at this age have unique characteristics and are different from adults, thus requiring treatment and educational strategies that suit their needs. In this case, the role of the principal as the leader of the early childhood education institution is very important to ensure that the teachers can carry out their duties professionally and are able to develop children's potential in all aspects of their development (Rizkyani et al., 2020). Kindergartens are early childhood education units that are in the formal education pathway, so principals need to ensure that kindergarten teachers can carry out quality learning and according to the characteristics of students (Rosdiana & Amrullah, 2021). The average age of kindergarten students, 4-6 years old, has a different way of learning from other levels of education.

Kindergarten education requires special attention for several fundamental reasons relating to child development and the foundation of continuing education. Here are some key points that explain why kindergarten education is crucial: (1) The Golden Period of Child Development. Kindergarten is a period that coincides with the *golden age* of child development, which is the age of 3-6 years. During this time, children's brains develop very rapidly and have an extraordinary ability to absorb new information and skills. Proper stimulation at this age will have a positive long-term impact on children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. (2) Character Building and Social Skills. Kindergarten education is not just about learning to read and write. More than that, kindergarten is where children learn to interact with peers, develop empathy, learn to share, cooperate and solve problems. The social and emotional skills learned in kindergarten become an important foundation for a child's ability to adapt and succeed in a wider social environment in the future. (3) Instilling Interest in Learning Early on. Fun and positive learning experiences in kindergarten can foster interest in learning in children from an early age. Through educational play activities, children are encouraged to explore, experiment and discover new things. This will motivate them to continue learning and developing themselves in the next level of education. (4) Building a Strong Academic Foundation. Although the main focus of kindergarten is not on formal academics, kindergarten education still plays an important role in building a strong academic foundation. Through specially designed activities, children are introduced to basic concepts such as numbers, letters, colors, shapes and sizes. This will help them be better prepared for the demands of learning in primary school. (5) Reducing the Education Gap. Kindergarten education can help reduce the education gap between children from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Children from less well-off families may not have access to adequate stimulation and learning experiences at home. Kindergarten education provides equal opportunities for all children to get a quality education and develop their potential optimally. (6) Preparation for the Era of Globalization. In the increasingly competitive era of globalization, kindergarten education plays an important role in preparing children for the challenges of the future. A quality kindergarten education can equip children with critical, creative, communicative and collaborative thinking skills, which are needed in the 21st century.

As such, special attention to kindergarten education is an important investment in the future of children and the nation. Governments, parents and communities need to work together to ensure that all children have access to quality and relevant kindergarten education.

Early childhood education policy has now become the main focus of the government.

Through Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, early childhood education has received important attention. Furthermore, in Presidential Regulation No. 60 of 2013 on Holistic-Integrative Early Childhood Development, the government emphasized its commitment to improving the quality of services and access to early childhood education. (Hadi, 2009) (Sari et al., 2019) Mursalina et al., 2023(Ismawati & Iisnawati, 2019)

However, the reality on the ground shows that there are still various challenges in organizing kindergarten education, especially those related to the quality of the learning process. One important aspect that affects the quality of learning in kindergarten is the competence and professionalism of teachers.

Kindergarten teachers are required to have various abilities, including academic, pedagogical, personality and social skills. In this case, the role of the principal as the leader of the kindergarten institution is very important to develop teacher professionalism. Kindergarten principals can implement various strategies to develop teachers' pedagogical professionalism, including (Mursalina et al., (Adisel & Pranansa, 2020),); Encouraging teachers to continue their education to a higher level; Providing adequate facilities and infrastructure to support innovative learning processes; Facilitating collaboration activities and sharing experiences between teachers; Providing ongoing mentoring and supervision to monitor and evaluate teacher learning practices (Adisel & Pranansa 2020(& Pranansa 2020; Establishing cooperation with related institutions/agencies to improve the quality of learning in kindergarten Adisel,) (Hadi, 2009).

These strategies are expected to help kindergarten teachers develop pedagogical competence, so that the learning process in kindergarten can take place effectively and have a positive impact on child development (Ariyanto et al., 2020) ((Sutrio et al., 2020Hadi, 2009)). The dimensions of the pedagogical competence development strategy are: (1) Understanding the characteristics of students; (2) Mastery of theories and principles of educational learning; (3) Development of curriculum; (4) Learning design; (5) Implementation of educational and dialogical learning.

Strategies for improving teachers' pedagogical competence must be integrated and sustainable. This means that the various dimensions above must be interrelated and implemented continuously to achieve optimal results. In addition, support from the school, government and community is also very important in the success of improving teacher competence. In order to develop the professionalism of kindergarten teachers, principals can make various efforts, including: a) Carry out training programs and develop teacher competence regularly; b) Encourage teachers to continue their education to a higher level; c) Provide adequate facilities and infrastructure to support innovative learning processes; d) Facilitate collaboration activities and share experiences between teachers; e) Provide assistance and supervision on an ongoing basis to monitor and evaluate teacher learning practices; f) Establish cooperation with related institutions/agencies to improve the quality of learning in kindergarten.

The formulation of the problem in this study is how the strategy of the principal of TKIT QU AT-Tartil in developing the pedagogical professionalism of kindergarten teachers. The purpose of this study is to analyze and describe the kindergarten principal's strategy in developing kindergarten teachers' pedagogical professionalism. (Wernely, 2018) (Putri et al., 2024) (Jujuniarti et al., 2021) (Diniyah et al., 2024)

Theory Review

Strategy Concept

Strategy can be defined as a comprehensive and integrated plan of action directed at achieving organizational goals (Diniyah et al., 2024). Strategy is a tool to achieve the long-term

goals of an organization. In the context of principal leadership, strategies can be interpreted as systematic steps taken by principals to achieve educational goals in the schools they lead (Wernely, 2018). Strategy, in its essence, is about how an organization achieves its goals. It involves making informed decisions about what to do, how to do it and why. Here are some basic theories underlying strategic thinking: (Jujuniarti et al., 2021) Strategic Management Theory, states that organizations must analyze the internal and external environment to identify opportunities and threats, as well as strengths and weaknesses, in order to formulate appropriate strategies. Leadership Theory, states that principals as leaders of educational institutions have an important role in directing, motivating, and empowering human resources (teachers) to achieve organizational goals. Teacher Professionalism Development Theory, states that teachers must continue to develop their competence and quality in order to provide quality learning services for students. Kindergarten teacher professionalism includes various dimensions, among others: (Jujuniarti et al., 2021) Pedagogical competence, which is the ability to manage student learning. The dimensions of pedagogical competence are as follows: *first*, understanding the characteristics of learners, is the teacher's ability to understand the stages of early childhood development, both physically, cognitively, social-emotionally, morally, and spiritually. Kindergarten teachers must have the ability to understand the various characteristics of students, both in terms of physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, moral, and spiritual, in order to design and implement learning that is in accordance with the needs and development of students.

Second, mastery of theories and principles of educational learning, which is the teacher's ability to understand the principles of learning that are in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood, such as learning through play, learning while moving, learning in a conducive environment, etc. The principles of educational learning must be understood and applied by kindergarten teachers so that the learning process can take place effectively and fun for children. *Third*, curriculum development, is the teacher's ability to develop lesson plans, select and organize materials, media, and learning resources in accordance with the characteristics of children. Kindergarten teachers must be proficient in developing a flexible and child-centered kindergarten curriculum so that learning can run optimally. Learning design is the teacher's ability to design learning activities, including formulating goals, choosing strategies, methods, media, and learning resources that are in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood.

Fourth, learning design, is the teacher's ability to determine learning strategies, manage the classroom, and design assessments of children's learning processes and outcomes. The teacher's ability to design effective and enjoyable learning for children will determine the success of learning implementation. *Fifth*, the implementation of educational and dialogical learning is the teacher's ability to create a learning atmosphere that is fun, interactive, challenging, and motivates children to learn. Kindergarten teachers must be able to create a conducive learning atmosphere, provide positive feedback, and encourage children's active participation in learning.

Pedagogical Competence

Pedagogical competence is the ability of a teacher to manage the learning process. Pedagogical competence includes several abilities, including (Marlina, 2018): 1. understanding educational insights or foundations, 2. understanding of students, 3. curriculum/syllabus development, 4. learning design, 5. implementation of educational and dialogical learning, 6. utilization of learning technology, 7. evaluation of learning outcomes, and 8. development of students to actualize their various potentials.

Teachers who have good pedagogical competence will be able to design and implement effective and enjoyable learning for students. As an educator, teachers must have a set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that must be owned, lived, and mastered in carrying out their

professional duties. Thus, the pedagogical competence of kindergarten teachers plays a very important role in optimally developing the potential of students.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. This descriptive research is research that really only describes what exists or occurs in a particular scene, field or area (Arikunto, 2019). The research subjects were the principal and teachers of At-Tartil Al-Qur'an Integrated Islamic Kindergarten (TKIT) which is located at Jl. Karamat No.25B, RT 01/03, Karamat Village, Gunung Puyuh Sub-district, Sukabumi City. Data collection techniques used interviews, observations, and documentation studies. The data obtained were analyzed using the following steps: 1) data reduction, 2) data presentation, and 3) conclusion drawing.

Result and Discussion

Understanding Learner Characteristics

Based on the results of observations, interviews and documentation studies on understanding the characteristics of kindergarten students, the principal has encouraged and assisted teachers in understanding the characteristics of students, both in terms of physical, cognitive, social-emotional, moral and spiritual. A good understanding of children's characteristics will make it easier for teachers to design and implement learning in accordance with the needs and stages of children's development. The diversity of learners' characters also requires principals to facilitate teachers in developing various learning approaches that can accommodate children's individual needs (Marlina, 2018) (Rosdiana & Amrullah, 2021). Aspects of learning facilities and the learning environment are also considered by principals so that the learning process can take place in a conducive and enjoyable manner for children. The comfort of the learning environment created by the principal makes children feel comfortable and motivated to learn (Asfiana et al., 2024).

Mastery of Educational Learning Theories and Principles

Kindergarten principals have facilitated and motivated teachers to master learning theories and principles that are in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood, such as learning through play, learning while moving, learning in a conducive environment, etc. As educators, it is very urgent to know the principles of learning that can guide educators' activities in planning and implementing learning to be more effective, although it is not the only way that can determine learning procedures, but it can be a guide for educators in carrying out learning activities (Ali, 2023). Teachers' understanding of the principles of educational learning will be very helpful in creating effective and enjoyable learning for children.

Efforts made by principals include training, workshops and regular discussions with teachers to improve teachers' pedagogical competence. Principals also motivate teachers to always innovate in choosing and using learning methods, strategies and media that are interesting and in accordance with the needs of early childhood.

Curriculum Development

Kindergarten principals have encouraged and assisted teachers to improve their ability to develop a flexible and child-centered kindergarten curriculum. Kindergarten teachers have been able to develop lesson plans, select and organize materials, media and learning resources in accordance with the characteristics of children. The principal specifically organizes regular curriculum development workshops so that teachers can create interesting, interactive and contextual learning for students. The utilization of information and communication technology in learning in kindergarten is one of the principal's concerns. Principals facilitate teachers in developing ICT-based learning to make it more interesting and motivate children to learn (Asfiana et al., 2024).

In addition to encouraging the use of ICT, the principal also ensures that learning in TKIT QU AT-Tartil remains child-centered and develops aspects of child development holistically, including aspects of religious and moral values, physical-motor In developing the curriculum, kindergarten teachers have also utilized information and communication technology to support the learning process, although there are still some obstacles related to limited facilities and infrastructure (Kristiantari, 2021).

Learning Design

The principal of TKIT QU AT-Tartil has facilitated the teachers in designing effective and fun learning, including formulating learning objectives, choosing strategies, methods, media and learning resources that are in line with the characteristics of early childhood. In designing learning, kindergarten teachers have also considered aspects of assessing children's learning processes and outcomes. The design of the implementation of educational learning that is prepared in accordance with the principles and steps of proper learning planning should be able to produce changes in students (Nurohim, 2020).

Principals develop Learning Design for teachers through weekday workshops, training, and intensive consultation or guidance. Principals ensure that teachers are able to design learning that is developmentally appropriate, starting from formulating objectives, choosing strategies, methods, media and learning resources, as well as considering the assessment of learning processes and outcomes.

Implementation of Educational and Dialogical Learning

The principal of TKIT QU AT-Tartil has encouraged and supported the teachers to create a conducive, interactive and fun learning atmosphere for children. Kindergarten teachers have been able to create child-centered learning, provide positive feedback, and encourage children's active participation in learning. Principals provide support, both morally and materially, so that teachers can carry out effective, interesting learning in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood. The principal also sets an example in implementing educational and dialogic learning so that teachers can follow suit. In addition, principals also develop a system for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of learning in the classroom, including providing feedback to teachers for further learning improvements.

Overall, the principal of TKIT Al-Qur'an At-Tartil Sukabumi City has made strategic efforts in developing teachers' pedagogical professionalism, starting from understanding the characteristics of students, mastering learning theories and principles, curriculum development, learning design, to implementing educational and dialogical learning.

Conclusion

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the principal of TKIT Al-Qur'an At-Tartil Sukabumi City has carried out several strategies in developing teachers' pedagogical professionalism, including understanding the characteristics of students, including physical, cognitive, social-emotional, moral, and spiritual aspects of early childhood, strengthening teachers' understanding of learning theories and principles that are in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood, such as learning through play, learning while moving, learning in a conducive environment, encouraging the development of a flexible, interesting, and child-centered kindergarten curriculum, and utilizing ICT in learning, facilitating teachers in designing effective and fun learning, starting from formulating goals, choosing strategies, methods, media, and learning resources that are in accordance with the characteristics of children.

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