ENHANCING PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCE OF TEACHERS TO IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS OF SOUTHWEST ACEH REGENCY

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Abstract
This study explores how teachers' pedagogical competence influences student achievement across three junior high schools in Aceh Barat Daya. Using a qualitative approach, the research gathered data through interviews, observations, and document analysis at SMP Negeri 1 Blangpidie, SMP Negeri 1 Setia, and SMP Negeri 3 Babahrot. The findings reveal significant differences in teacher composition and student performance among the three schools. SMP Negeri 1 Blangpidie, which has a substantial proportion of certified teachers, demonstrated improved teaching practices and rising student performance. In contrast, SMP Negeri 1 Setia, which lacks certified educators, showed relatively constant student achievement. Despite having some certified teachers, SMP Negeri 3 Babahrot faces challenges due to limited resources and socioeconomic conditions, which led to low student achievement. This research emphasizes the importance of teacher certification and continuous professional development in improving student achievement. It also underscores the need for holistic strategies that consider external factors affecting educational quality. The study recommends targeted professional development programs, stronger collaboration among stakeholders, and leveraging technology to enhance pedagogical competencies. Strategic investment in teacher development and comprehensive educational planning can significantly improve learning outcomes across diverse school settings.

Keywords: Pedagogical Competence, Teacher Certification, Student Achievement, Professional Development, Educational Quality

1. INTRODUCTION

Schools serve as institutions that prepare students with various competencies and life skills required to navigate the global era successfully. Without such skills, students face difficulties in adapting to changing environments. Education plays a crucial role in this regard (Irwansyah, 2021). According to Jamilah (2021), education, in both broad and specific terms, represents the effort to nurture and develop innate talents and potential, whether physical or mental, in line with societal values and culture. Teachers are the main educational workforce responsible for educating, instructing, training, and guiding students to prepare them for increasingly stiff global competition. Therefore, the professional status of teachers is essential for realizing the vision and mission of educational institutions.

Teachers occupy a strategic position in empowering and educating a nation and cannot be replaced by any other entity in the national life. The more significant the role and duties of teachers, the more reliable and prepared a society becomes. In other words, the future of a nation mirrors the current status of its teachers and depends on their image in society (Susanto, 2020). In simple terms, according to Warren (2022), a teacher is someone who imparts knowledge to students. In society's view, teachers may not necessarily conduct education only in formal settings but also in mosques, community centers, homes, etc.

Professional teachers prioritize the quality of their services and products. Their service must meet societal, national, and user needs while maximizing students' abilities according to their potential. To be a professional teacher, one must possess pedagogical, personality, professional, and social competencies. A teacher's competence is a primary factor influencing education quality. Teachers are on the front lines of human resource creation, directly engaging with students in the

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classroom through teaching. This highlights the need for competent teachers in their profession. The teaching-learning process is an interaction between two human elements: students and teachers. In dealing with students, teachers must understand their characteristics and conditions. They need to monitor physical growth and explore students' potential. If done correctly, this will enhance students' potential in increasing their knowledge and competencies. In helping students achieve their goals, teachers must excel in their field, be it pedagogical, professional, social, or personal competencies. This research emphasizes pedagogical competence.

According to Article 28 Paragraph 3, Clause A of the National Education Standards, pedagogical competence involves the ability to manage student learning, including understanding students, designing and implementing learning, evaluating learning outcomes, and developing students' potential. Aulia (2021) stated that pedagogical derives from the Greek words "paedos" and "agagos," meaning children and guiding, respectively. Hence, pedagogy means guiding children, which can involve knowledge, morals, and skills. In the classroom, pedagogical competence is essential for teachers to interact effectively with students. Thus, teachers must possess more than just the responsibility of educating or teaching in class. They must also manage student learning effectively to improve students' academic performance by choosing and determining appropriate methods, media, tools, and evaluation.

Observations in junior high schools in Aceh Barat Daya revealed several issues affecting student performance. Teachers often lack an in-depth understanding of their students and struggle with lesson planning and evaluation. These challenges limit the actualization of students' potential, resulting in subpar academic performance. Addressing these issues necessitates targeted efforts to enhance teachers' pedagogical competence.

This research aims to explore how the development of teachers' pedagogical competence can be optimized to improve student performance in Southwest Aceh District. Specifically, it will examine the programs and strategies in place for enhancing this competence and identify the supporting and inhibiting factors that impact these efforts. Understanding these aspects will provide valuable insights into improving education quality in the region.

The implications of this research extend beyond individual teachers and students. By enhancing teachers' pedagogical competence, schools can ensure that students receive the best possible education, allowing them to achieve their full potential. The findings can also serve as a foundation for policy recommendations to the local education office, guiding broader initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the area. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to the broader knowledge base on educational administration and support the ongoing development of effective teaching practices.

2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD
2.1. Research Approach

This study utilizes a qualitative research approach, aiming to provide descriptive analysis of data. According to Sugiyono (2019), qualitative research is based on post-positivism philosophy and involves studying natural conditions where the researcher acts as the primary instrument. Data collection is done through triangulation, while analysis is inductive, emphasizing the meaning of findings rather than generalizations. Mappasere and Suyuti (2019) describe qualitative research as descriptive and analytical, highlighting processes and meanings. Theory guides the focus of the study, ensuring alignment with field observations. McCusker and Gunaydin (2015) emphasize qualitative methods for understanding community or individual perspectives on particular issues. Qualitative methods enrich understanding of the underlying substance of events (Sofaer, 1999), providing deeper insights. Therefore, researchers need sufficient knowledge of the topic to offer comprehensive insights.

2.2. Research Location and Timeline

This study was conducted in Aceh Barat Daya, specifically in three junior high schools: SMP Negeri 1 Blangpidie, SMP Negeri 1 Setia, and SMP Negeri 3 Babahrot. The study spanned five months, from November 2023 to March 2024. It included data collection, processing, analysis, report writing, seminars, revisions, and report printing.

2.3. Research Subjects

Research subjects include teachers, principals, and students from SMP Negeri 1 Blangpidie, SMP Negeri 1 Setia, and SMP Negeri 3 Babahrot. These schools were selected based on their performance in the National Assessment for Computer-Based Testing, representing schools with good, average, and low categories, respectively. These subjects provide comprehensive data on the implementation of teachers' pedagogical competence in enhancing student achievement.

2.4. Data Collection Techniques

2.4.1. Interviews:

Following Herdiansyah (2018), interviews involve a structured process where the interviewer asks questions to gather information. Lincoln and Guba suggest that interviews reconstruct events and verify information. In this study, interviews are guided by predetermined questions.

2.4.2. Documentation Method:

According to Sugiyono (2019), the documentation method involves collecting records, transcripts, books, and other documents. Data was requested directly from school administrators. This included: Student achievement scores from computer-based assessments, School demographics, Historical context of each school, Teacher and staff details., Pedagogical development history. And Organizational structures.

2.4.3. Observation Method:

Sugiyono (2019) describes observation as systematic recording of observable phenomena. This study used systematic observation to gather data on the geographic layout and learning processes at the schools.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 School Profiles

This study was conducted at three junior high schools in Aceh Barat Daya Regency: SMPN 1 Blangpidie, SMPN 1 Setia, and SMPN 3 Babahrot. The profiles of each school are as follows:

1. SMPN 1 Blangpidie: SMPN 1 Blangpidie, established on September 3, 1979, is one of the oldest and most favored junior high schools in Aceh Barat Daya. It has 551 students and 66 teachers and staff. The school implements the Merdeka Curriculum and is one of the pioneering schools for this curriculum.
2. SMPN 1 Setia: SMPN 1 Setia was established on October 28, 1995. It currently has 219 students and 35 teachers and staff. The school implements the 2013 Curriculum.
3. SMPN 3 Babahrot: SMPN 3 Babahrot was established on September 10, 2007. It has 150 students and 23 teachers and staff. The school also implements the 2013 Curriculum.

3.2. Programs for Developing Teachers' Pedagogical Competence

The findings showed that the principals of the three schools had included teacher competency development programs in their school curricula and annual budgets. However, the programs were not specifically focused on pedagogical competence but rather on general competencies such as learning, IT mastery, curriculum strengthening, subject teacher working

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groups (MGMP), and workshops. The teacher competency development programs carried out by the schools included:

1. Curriculum training
2. Information technology training
3. MGMP and regional teacher competency improvement
4. Seminars/workshops for teachers

The principals also conducted routine supervision and evaluation of the learning process to monitor teachers' skills development.

3.3. Strategies for Developing Teachers' Pedagogical Competence

The principals employed various strategies to enhance the pedagogical competence of teachers in their respective schools. One key approach was providing motivation, where principals consistently encouraged teachers to continuously develop their competencies, particularly pedagogical skills, in order to improve the quality of learning and boost student achievement. This ongoing encouragement was seen as crucial for maintaining teachers' focus on professional growth.

Another important strategy was fostering team cooperation. Principals actively promoted a sense of togetherness in managing the school and encouraged collaborative planning of teacher competency development programs based on the specific needs of the teachers. By involving teachers in the planning process, principals aimed to ensure that the programs addressed the most relevant areas for improvement.

Furthermore, principals facilitated teachers' participation in competency development activities by allocating school budgets for this purpose. This financial support allowed teachers to engage in training and workshops organized by the schools themselves, as well as those provided by local education offices or other external institutions. By enabling teachers to access these opportunities, principals demonstrated their commitment to continuous professional development.

3.4 Supporting Factors and Obstacles

The study identified several factors that supported the development of teachers' pedagogical competence. One key factor was the availability of facilities and infrastructure in the schools, which provided a conducive environment for teaching and learning. Another supporting factor was the presence of certified teachers who had undergone intensive pedagogical training. These teachers could serve as valuable resources and mentors for their colleagues. Support from the surrounding community was also identified as a contributing factor. When parents and the wider community were actively engaged and supportive of the schools' efforts, it created a positive atmosphere that encouraged teacher development. Additionally, support from the education office and other relevant agencies was seen as crucial for providing resources, guidance, and opportunities for teacher training.

However, the study also revealed obstacles that hindered the development of teachers' pedagogical competence. One major challenge was the busy schedules of teachers at school, which limited the time available for professional development activities. Heavy workloads and numerous responsibilities often made it difficult for teachers to dedicate sufficient time to enhancing their pedagogical skills. Another obstacle was the lack of motivation and competence exhibited by some teachers. Despite the efforts of principals to encourage professional growth, certain teachers demonstrated a reluctance to engage in development activities or lacked the necessary skills to effectively implement new pedagogical approaches. Lastly, low student motivation and a lack of community support in some areas posed significant challenges. When students were not actively engaged in learning or when the community did not value education, it created a difficult environment for teachers to implement effective pedagogical strategies and foster student achievement.

Table 1. Teacher Composition at Each School

School	Total Teachers	Certified Teachers
SMPN 1 Blangpidie	66	19
SMPN 1 Setia	27	10
SMPN 3 Babahrot	23	8

From the table 1 it shows us Teacher Composition and its Impact on Student Achievement. SMP Negeri 1 Blangpidie has the largest teaching staff among the three schools, with 66 teachers, 19 of whom are certified. This high number of certified teachers reflects the school's strong base of qualified professionals, potentially contributing to enhanced student learning outcomes. In contrast, SMP Negeri 1 Setia employs 27 teachers, with ten certified, suggesting the mid proportion of the staff. SMP Negeri 3 Babahrot has 23 teachers, with eight certified, suggesting a fair proportion of certified staff relative to its smaller size.

Table 2. Student Achievement based on National Assessment Results

School	Literacy Score	Numeracy Score
SMPN 1 Blangpidie	Increasing	Increasing
SMPN 1 Setia	Relatively constant	Relatively constant
SMPN 3 Babahrot	Quite low	Quite low

From the Table 2, Student Achievement Based on National Assessment Results. The National Assessment results reflect the varying educational outcomes at these schools. SMP Negeri 1 Blangpidie demonstrates improving scores in literacy and numeracy, which could be linked to its high number of certified teachers, enabling effective teaching strategies. SMP Negeri 1 Setia's relatively constant performance in both literacy and numeracy may be influenced by the absence of certified teachers, potentially hindering the adoption of innovative pedagogical methods. Despite having a fair proportion of certified teachers, SMP Negeri 3 Babahrot has low scores in literacy and numeracy. This could be attributed to challenges like limited resources, the school's rural location, and socioeconomic factors impacting student performance.

In general, while the schools had implemented teacher competency development programs, they had not specifically focused on pedagogical competence. Principals used various strategies to encourage teacher development, but obstacles such as busy schedules and lack of motivation persisted. Certified teachers who had undergone pedagogical training tended to have a positive influence on student achievement. Continued efforts to address the obstacles and optimize the supporting factors are needed to further enhance teachers' pedagogical competence and student performance.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of pedagogical competence development on student achievement across three junior high schools in Aceh Barat Daya. The findings reveal significant variations in teacher composition and student outcomes, underscoring the critical role of teacher qualifications and external factors in shaping educational success. The study underscores the importance of teacher certification and professional development in enhancing student achievement. However, it also reveals the need for holistic approaches that consider the broader context influencing educational outcomes. Implementing targeted programs, encouraging collaboration, and utilizing technology can enhance pedagogical competencies and improve educational quality across different school settings.

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Teacher Composition and Pedagogical Competence: Schools with a higher proportion of certified teachers, such as SMP Negeri 1 Blangpidie, tend to demonstrate more effective teaching practices and improved student outcomes. The absence of certified teachers, as seen in SMP Negeri 1 Setia, can limit the adoption of advanced pedagogical methods. SMP Negeri 3 Babahrot, despite having a fair share of certified teachers, faces challenges that may affect its overall teaching effectiveness. Student Achievement Based on National Assessment: There is a noticeable correlation between the number of certified teachers and student achievement. SMP Negeri 1 Blangpidie shows increasing literacy and numeracy scores, likely benefiting from its strong teacher qualifications. In contrast, SMP Negeri 1 Setia's performance remains stagnant, possibly due to a lack of certified educators. SMP Negeri 3 Babahrot exhibits low scores, suggesting that factors beyond teacher certification, such as infrastructure, location, and socioeconomic conditions, also play a significant role. Challenges and Recommendations: The study identifies key challenges, including resource limitations, varying teacher motivation, and time constraints. Addressing these challenges requires tailored development programs, improved stakeholder engagement, and leveraging technology to enhance teacher training. Establishing incentive systems and continuous evaluation frameworks can further motivate teachers to pursue professional development.

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