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CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS: ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONAL MATURITY, CAREER PLANNING, AND PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE

Farida Mayar & Felyn Ayanda
Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia
mayarfarida@gmail.com; felynayanda22@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the relationship among emotional maturity, career planning, and professional competence in supporting the career development of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers. A qualitative descriptive-analytical approach was employed through a literature study, with relevant sources identified from Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and Sinta. The findings indicate that PAUD teacher career development is a continuous process shaped by the integration of three key factors. Emotional maturity contributes to teachers' psychological resilience and self-efficacy, career planning supports the systematic determination of professional development goals and strategies, and professional competence serves as a central indicator of teacher performance quality. These three dimensions are interrelated and form a holistic framework for sustainable teacher career development. The study concludes that an integrative approach combining emotional maturity, career planning, and professional competence is essential for designing more comprehensive and sustainable PAUD teacher development programs. These findings contribute to the literature on teacher professional development by emphasizing the need for multidimensional career development frameworks that can strengthen teacher quality and improve early childhood education in Indonesia.

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Keywords: Career Planning; Early Childhood Education Teachers; Emotional Maturity; Professional Competence; Teacher Career Development

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is the primary foundation for developing quality human resources. PAUD teachers play a central role as primary facilitators in shaping the cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development of young children. The quality of PAUD education depends heavily on the competence and dedication of teachers, as they not only impart basic knowledge but also build the foundation of character and readiness for lifelong learning in children. Qualified PAUD teachers are able to create a stimulating learning environment, thus directly impacting children's learning outcomes and the overall quality of education (Siraj et al., 2023).

However, early childhood education (PAUD) teachers face various professional challenges in today's era. Competency demands are increasing along with technological advances and the need for holistic child development, including the ability to adapt to new curricula such as the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes play-based learning and character development. The shift in educational paradigms from conventional approaches to more inclusive, child-centered, and evidence-based approaches increasingly requires early childhood education (PAUD) teachers to continuously improve their pedagogical and managerial skills. Amid these challenges, teacher career development is crucial for maintaining motivation, retention, and continuous professional improvement, thereby supporting the achievement of higher national education standards (A. Yulianti & Rusmini, 2023)

Specific challenges currently facing early childhood education (PAUD) teachers include low academic qualifications and unequal access to professional development, particularly in rural and non-formal areas. Many PAUD teachers still face excessive workloads with low compensation, leading to high rates of emotional exhaustion and turnover. Data shows that early childhood education (PAUD) management is often suboptimal in supporting career development, impacting the quality of learning and child development (Sahadatunnisa et al., 2023).

Previous research has extensively addressed aspects of early childhood education (ECE) teacher professional development. A randomized controlled trial (R&D) study by (Siraj

et al., 2023) demonstrated that leadership for learning interventions through professional development (PD) programs significantly improved teaching quality and child development outcomes in preschools. Similarly, (Ye et al., 2024) found that preschool teachers' emotional competence was positively associated with self-efficacy and teaching performance, particularly in Asian contexts.

Other studies, such as (Sahadatunnisa et al., 2023), highlight the importance of enhancing the professionalism of ECE teachers through ongoing training to support the quality of early childhood learning. Meanwhile, (A. Yulianti & Rusmini, 2023) analyze ECE management in the context of improving learning quality in Indonesia, focusing on institutional comparisons and management strategies. These studies provide a strong empirical basis for the importance of competency and professional development, but are still limited by a partial approach.

Nevertheless, there are research gaps worthy of further investigation. Most previous studies tend to explore one or two variables separately, such as pedagogical competence or general professional development, without integrating emotional maturity as a crucial mediator in early childhood education teacher career planning. This gap is increasingly relevant in the Indonesian context, where changing educational paradigms demand holistic adaptations that have not been widely empirically tested.

A clear research gap evident in previous studies is the partial nature of existing research. Many studies focus solely on single aspects, such as professional competence or career development, without considering the interaction with emotional maturity as a supporting factor for teacher professional resilience (Siraj et al., 2023; Ye et al., 2024). Furthermore, there is limited previous research specifically targeting the context of early childhood education teachers in Indonesia, where structural challenges such as access to training and low professional status remain prevalent.

Furthermore, there is still a lack of truly integrative research that combines the three main variables of emotional maturity, career planning, and professional competence into a single analytical framework for early childhood education teacher career development. This holistic approach is important because these three aspects mutually influence teacher resilience and performance amidst the dynamic demands of education, leaving significant opportunities for more comprehensive and contextual research.

This study aims to analyze the relationship between emotional maturity, career planning, and professional competence in the career development of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers. Specifically, this study is expected to fill a research gap by providing an integrative model that can serve as policy recommendations for PAUD institutions, local governments, and teacher training programs.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive-analytical library research approach. This method was chosen because the primary objective of the study was to analyze, synthesize, and identify patterns of relationships between emotional maturity, career planning, and professional competence in the context of early childhood education (PAUD) teacher career development based on existing empirical findings. Library research allows researchers to conduct a systematic review of scientific literature without collecting primary data in the field, making it more suitable for uncovering research gaps and building an integrative conceptual framework (Snyder, 2019). The data collection process was carried out systematically through literature searches in leading databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and Sinta (Science and Technology Index)

RESULT

1. Emotional Maturity in Teacher Career Development

Emotional maturity supports the resilience and career progression of early childhood education teachers by helping them manage professional challenges and interpersonal interactions in early childhood education settings. Teachers with high levels of emotional maturity tend to be more resilient to burnout and have a stronger career commitment. Research (Damayanti & Nainggolan, 2022) found that emotional maturity significantly influences teacher burnout rates, with coping strategies acting as a mediator strengthening this relationship.

Internationally, (Ye et al., 2024) demonstrated that preschool teachers' emotional competence is positively correlated with self-efficacy and teaching performance, ultimately supporting long-term career development in early childhood education. Furthermore (Habibah & Pranoto, 2024), in their study of kindergarten teachers' responses to career-

focused parents, confirmed that a mature social-emotional perspective helps early childhood education teachers effectively manage family dynamics, thereby enhancing emotional stability and supporting professional career advancement amidst complex work demands.

2. Early Childhood Education Teacher Career Planning

Effective career planning encourages early childhood education teachers to evaluate their competencies, explore professional opportunities, and direct their professional development toward long-term career goals. This process includes active participation in training, learning communities, and regular reflection to adapt to the demands of the Independent Curriculum and educational technology. According to (Inda Pratiwi, 2024), thorough career planning not only enhances the professionalism of early childhood education teachers but also directly impacts the quality of early childhood learning. Without clear planning, early childhood education teachers are vulnerable to career stagnation, especially in rural areas where access to professional development is still limited.

Furthermore, (Mazidah et al., 2025) highlight that career development is a top priority for beginning early childhood education teachers, with teacher training and education in accordance with NCTEPS standards mandatory to establish a clear career path and support effective teacher management at the institutional level.

3. The Professional Competencies Of Early Childhood Education

The professional competencies of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers encompass pedagogical, personality, social, and professional dimensions, which must be continuously honed to meet national standards. Many early childhood education (PAUD) teachers still exhibit competency gaps, particularly in the application of technology and meaningful thematic learning. A study by (Zaky et al., 2025) highlighted that competency development strategies through learning communities have proven effective in contextually and sustainably improving the abilities of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers.

Similarly, (Sofwatul et al., 2025) in her literature review emphasized the importance of equipping prospective early childhood education (PAUD) teachers with professional competencies from the pre-service stage to prepare them for the demands of the field. A study by (Mulya, G. A. et al., 2026) found that early childhood education teachers' professional competencies in designing meaningful thematic learning are still at an early stage, with implementation focusing more on administrative tasks than on reflection and child development. Therefore, structured interventions are needed for continuous improvement

DISCUSSION

1. The Dynamics of the Relationship between Emotional Maturity, Career Planning, and Professional Competence in Early Childhood Education Teacher Career Development

The integration of emotional maturity, career planning, and professional competence forms a holistic, mutually reinforcing framework for early childhood education teacher career development. Emotional maturity serves as an emotional foundation that enables teachers to develop realistic and proactive career plans, while sound career planning encourages the improvement of professional competence through continuous learning. (Ye et al., 2024) and (Damayanti & Nainggolan, 2022) collectively demonstrate that high emotional competence increases self-efficacy, which in turn influences career planning and professional performance. (Inda Pratiwi, 2024) complements these findings by stating that these three variables must be integrated into teacher development programs to achieve a more comprehensive and sustainable impact.

Furthermore, teachers' emotional maturity also directly contributes to their ability to manage stress, make informed decisions, and build positive relationships in the workplace, ultimately strengthening professional development and the quality of learning (Aldrup et al., 2020; Dr. Mandeep Kaur, 2024; Khlivna, 2022; Meher et al., 2025).Teachers with emotional maturity tend to have better psychological well-being and stronger professional commitment, thus being more consistent in carrying out their roles and responsibilities (Dr. Mandeep Kaur, 2024; Meher et al., 2025)

In the context of career planning, emotional literacy helps individuals make more informed career choices, understand personal interests and values, and navigate career uncertainty more adaptively (Khoriah & Lestari, 2023; Pirsoul et al., 2023; D. I. Yulianti & Nurhayani, 2024). Studies of adolescents indicate that emotional maturity is positively associated with the quality of career decision-making (Khoriah & Lestari, 2023; D. I. Yulianti & Nurhayani, 2024). A similar pattern is potentially relevant for teachers planning their career paths and professional specializations.

Systematic career planning enables teachers and prospective early childhood education (ECE) teachers to map out short- and long-term goals, as well as the competencies needed to develop at each career stage. A Workplace-Oriented Learning (WOL)-based curriculum approach for prospective early childhood education teachers, which includes stages of career

awareness, career exploration, career preparation, and career training, has been shown to bridge theory with practice and prepare graduates who are better prepared to face the demands of the workforce (Halimah et al., 2024; Rasli et al., 2021).

In line with this, the effectiveness of career planning cannot be separated from the interaction between personal and contextual factors, which simultaneously influence the development of professional competence in early childhood education teachers. A study (Windi Pebriannti, 2024) confirms that the development of PAUD teacher competence in the early childhood learning process is the intersection of these three variables, where emotional maturity and thorough career planning directly support the holistic improvement of pedagogical competence. Teacher professional competence, including pedagogical skills, material mastery, and social-emotional competence, is influenced by personal factors (EI/emotional maturity, adversity quotient) and contextual factors (training, institutional culture, organizational support) (Hifza et al., 2023; Palupi & Sugito, 2025).

Furthermore, the development of professional competency of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers has been shown to be enhanced through various forms of training and professional development, including basic teaching skills training, traditional APE development, basic motor skills training, digital competency strengthening, and e-module development workshops (Hifza et al., 2023; Putri et al., 2020; Rahminawati et al., 2020). These studies demonstrate significant improvements in teachers' knowledge, skills, and variety of learning methods, as well as their understanding of child development.

Findings in Indonesia indicate that emotional intelligence and adversity quotient are significantly related to teacher professional competence, with adversity quotient being the stronger predictor (Widodo et al., 2022). This indicates that emotional regulation, resilience in the face of adversity, and a clear career orientation form a mutually reinforcing dynamic between career planning and professional competence in early childhood education teachers

2. The Role of Emotional Maturity in Strengthening Early Childhood Education Teacher Career Development

Emotional maturity is seen as a crucial condition for professional growth, as it regulates all domains of psychological life and serves as the foundation for developing effective professional activities (Khlivna, 2022). Teachers who are able to recognize, understand, and manage emotions tend to have better interpersonal relationships, higher work commitment,

and greater job satisfaction, all of which are relevant for career sustainability (Aldrup et al., 2020; Dr. Mandeep Kaur, 2024; Meher et al., 2025; Widodo et al., 2022)

Research on teachers' social-emotional competencies shows that the ability to regulate emotions and manage relationships in the classroom is correlated with emotional support provided to students, the quality of teacher-student relationships, and work well-being (e.g., decreased depersonalization and increased job satisfaction) (Aldrup et al., 2020) . In the context of early childhood education teachers, this capacity is crucial because intense interactions with young children require patience, empathy, and emotional stability to prevent pedagogical malpractice (Putri et al., 2020; Rahminawati et al., 2020).

Emotional maturity also plays a role in resilience in the face of change, such as policy changes, curriculum demands, or crisis situations like the pandemic. Studies in Indonesia show that emotional intelligence and adversity quotient significantly improve teachers' professional competence, both directly and through organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), which is extra-role behavior such as helping colleagues and taking initiative in tasks (Widodo et al., 2022). Therefore, strengthening emotional maturity and resilience (AQ) can be a key strategy in designing career development programs and professionalism for early childhood education (ECE) teachers

3. Implications for Early Childhood Education Teacher Development

The findings of this literature have strong practical implications for early childhood education teacher development in Indonesia. Early childhood education institutions and local governments need to design integrative training programs that combine emotional maturity modules, career planning workshops, and community-based competency training. Studies by (Zaky et al., 2025) and (Alya Lathifa et al., 2025) recommend utilizing the Merdeka Mengajar platform and learning communities as primary tools to support sustainable development.

The long-term implications include increased teacher retention, reduced burnout, and higher quality early childhood education, ultimately contributing to the achievement of national human resource development targets. A study by (Nurfharizi et al., 2025) concluded that the practical implication of this holistic approach is the creation of a collaborative and reflective culture in early childhood education institutions, which not only enhances individual teacher capacity but also strengthens the overall career development ecosystem at the national level.

4. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, this research employed a literature review approach without primary field data collection; therefore, the findings depend heavily on the quality and scope of the reviewed literature. Second, most of the reviewed studies focused on specific educational contexts, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to all PAUD institutions in Indonesia. Third, variations in research methodologies, sample characteristics, and measurement indicators across the reviewed studies may influence the consistency of the synthesized findings. In addition, the availability of empirical studies specifically examining the integration of emotional maturity, career planning, and professional competence in PAUD teacher career development remains limited. Future studies are recommended to conduct empirical investigations using quantitative or mixed-method approaches to validate the integrative framework proposed in this study.

CONCLUSION

Early childhood education teacher career development is a continuous process that focuses not only on promotion but also on strengthening professional capacity, self-reflection, and adaptability to changes in early childhood education. Studies show that emotional maturity is a crucial foundation for supporting teacher psychological resilience, reducing the risk of burnout, and increasing self-efficacy in carrying out professional duties. Furthermore, career planning serves as a strategic direction that helps teachers set goals, develop their potential, and systematically and sustainably utilize various professional development opportunities.

Furthermore, professional competence is a key indicator of successful early childhood education teacher career development, encompassing pedagogical, social, personality, and professional aspects. These three aspects—emotional maturity, career planning, and professional competence—are integrated and form a holistic, mutually reinforcing framework that supports optimal teacher career development. Therefore, a concerted effort is needed from early childhood education institutions and the government to design comprehensive and sustainable development programs to improve teacher quality, strengthen teacher retention, and encourage improvements in the quality of early childhood education in Indonesia.

The theoretical contribution of this research is to enrich the study of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) teacher career development through an integrative approach that connects emotional maturity, career planning, and professional competence within a unified conceptual

framework. This research provides an understanding that teacher career development is not only influenced by professional competence alone, but also by the teacher's ability to manage emotions and systematically plan career directions. Practically, the results of this study can be used as a consideration for PAUD institutions, the government, and teacher training providers in designing more comprehensive professional development programs, such as emotional maturity strengthening training, career planning workshops, and community-based learning competency development to improve the quality and sustainability of PAUD teacher careers.

Recommendations for further research include conducting empirical research using a quantitative or mixed methods approach to directly examine the influence of emotional maturity, career planning, and professional competence on the career development of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers across various regional contexts and types of educational institutions. Future research is also recommended to include other variables such as work motivation, organizational culture, principal leadership, and teacher well-being to obtain a more comprehensive model of PAUD teacher career development. Furthermore, longitudinal research is also important to observe the sustainable, long-term career development of PAUD teachers.

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