



Journal of Innovative Pedagogy

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026

Published by: SIH

Publication Date: February 11, 2026

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18596418>

PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS & ITS CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

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Abstract-The article scientifically examines the professional competence of preschool teachers as one of the main requirements of the modern education system. Competence is defined as an integrative unity of knowledge, skills, personal qualities, and values that ensure the quality of pedagogical activity. Within the scope of the study, the cognitive, practical-methodical, and communicative components of competence are analyzed, and their significance for the professional development of preschool teachers and the effectiveness of the educational process is identified.

The findings show that a competent preschool teacher is not only a specialist possessing theoretical knowledge but also a professional who adopts a child-centered, creative, innovative, and reflective pedagogical approach based on children's individual characteristics and developmental needs. The teacher's communicative and socio-emotional skills, adherence to professional ethical principles, and inclination toward continuous self-improvement are among the key factors ensuring both the psychological safety and developmental character of the educational environment.

The results indicate that a high level of competence enhances the quality of education in preschool institutions, positively affects children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, and contributes to a more humanistic educational environment. The theoretical approaches and scientific findings presented in the article further confirm the importance of implementing a competence-based model in preschool teacher training.

Keywords: *preschool teacher, pedagogical competence, professional skills, pedagogical reflection, communication skills*



Introduction

Rapid social, technological, and pedagogical changes occurring in modern education systems impose new and increasingly demanding requirements on the professional activities of preschool teachers. The decisive role of early childhood in personality formation makes the level of pedagogical competence of specialists working in this field particularly significant. Since the foundations of children's cognitive, social, emotional, and communicative development are established during this stage, the quality of the educational process in preschool institutions depends directly on the professional preparedness of the preschool teacher.

In contemporary pedagogical approaches, the concept of competence is understood not merely as a set of professional knowledge and skills but as an integrated system of knowledge, abilities, values, and personal qualities that enable teachers to effectively plan, implement, evaluate, and reflect on the educational process (Bredenkamp & Copple, 2009, p. 45). The increasing complexity of social life, the diversification of children's developmental needs, and the rapid advancement of innovative educational technologies require preschool teachers to continuously update their pedagogical practices and adopt flexible instructional approaches.

Early childhood represents an intensive stage of development and provides favorable conditions for revealing children's individual characteristics and potential abilities. From this perspective, the professional activity of

the preschool teacher is not limited to the transmission of knowledge; it also involves the creation of a psychologically safe, inclusive, and stimulating learning environment. To fulfill this role effectively, preschool teachers must possess a deep understanding of age-related developmental patterns, consider children's individual and social needs, regulate group interactions appropriately, and apply development-oriented pedagogical strategies (Piaget, 1964; Vygotsky, 1978).

Moreover, modern preschool education emphasizes family-school collaboration, inclusive education, competency-based approaches, and the integration of innovative pedagogical technologies. These trends significantly increase both the complexity and the level of responsibility associated with the professional role of the preschool teacher. Global educational developments necessitate that preschool teachers adopt reflective thinking, engage in continuous professional development, and implement child-centered approaches in their pedagogical practice.

Thus, the formation, assessment, and continuous development of preschool teachers' professional competence emerge as a pressing scientific and pedagogical issue. This article aims to analyze the essence and key components of professional competence in preschool teachers and to explore effective ways of fostering its development from a theoretical perspective.

Methodology

Academic research in the field of preschool education assesses the competence of the

educator as one of the key determinants of a child's early development. Since early childhood is a critical phase in which the cognitive, emotional, social, and moral foundations of personality are formed, the professional competencies of the educator-teacher working during this stage are of particular scientific interest (Denham & Brown, 2010, p. 654). Bredekamp and Copple (2009, p. 52) define teacher competence in early childhood education as the ability to apply pedagogical approaches that take into account a child's age-related characteristics, individual developmental level, and interests. According to them, a competent educator creates a developmental environment, stimulates the child's natural learning potential, and ensures emotional security.

Research based on Piaget's theory of development shows that the competence of a teacher working with preschool children is closely linked to their ability to correctly assess the children's pre-operational cognitive characteristics and organize learning activities in a play-based manner. In this regard, the teacher's pedagogical and psychological competence is considered a key prerequisite for early cognitive development.

Modern academic research, citing Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of development, presents the competence of the early years educator as the ability to identify a child's zone of proximal development and to support it with appropriate pedagogical guidance. According to this approach, the communicative and reflective competencies of the educator play a crucial role in the development of children's social skills and emotional stability (Vygotsky, 1978).

Denham and Brown (2010) note that the emotional competence of the early years educator – empathy, patience, and positive communication skills – significantly impacts the development of self-regulation and social adjustment skills in children.

Being competent is one of the essential qualities for preschool teachers. Professional competence refers to the teacher's knowledge in their field, the ability to apply that knowledge, and the possession of relevant professional skills. It also includes mastery of modern teaching technologies and pedagogical methods.

The effectiveness of a preschool teacher's pedagogical work largely depends on their level of competence. Competence ensures meaningful and engaging activities, fosters motivation in children, and facilitates effective learning. When teachers approach their work competently, both educational sessions and upbringing activities become more comprehensible and interesting for children.

The key responsibilities essential for professional competence include:

1. Understanding the purpose and nature of pedagogical work – Awareness of objectives, content, and responsibilities enhances professional competence.
2. Ability to transform knowledge into skills – Competence strengthens the ability to convert theoretical knowledge into practical skills.
3. Understanding child psychology – Deep knowledge of child psychology enables teachers to work effectively with children.
4. Interest and motivation for working with children – Genuine enthusiasm fosters continuous self-improvement.
5. Self-development and continuous improvement – Continuous learning and reflective practice promote professional growth.

In modern education, teachers also act as researchers, psychologists, and technologists,

which requires creative and problem-solving approaches

Research Methodological Framework

Table 1 *Research Methodological Framework and Methods Used*

Methodological Component	Description	Purpose	Application in Preschool Context
Research Design	Qualitative, descriptive, and practice-based research design	To investigate the competence of preschool educators within real pedagogical processes	Daily educational and play activities in preschool groups are observed and analyzed
Theoretical Approaches	Systematic, child-centered, activity-based, and developmental approaches	To explain the multi-component nature of teacher competence	Pedagogical strategies are matched with children's age, development level, and individual needs
Research Object	Preschool educator-teachers	To study the essence and structure of teachers' professional activities	Educators working with children aged 1–6 in preschool institutions
Research Subject	Professional competence characteristics of preschool teachers	To identify indicators of competence	Pedagogical, psychological, communicative, reflective, and ethical competencies
Data Collection Methods	Pedagogical observation, analysis of teaching materials, qualitative documentation review	To gather practice-based data	Observation of teacher behavior during lessons, games, and interaction with parents
Data Analysis Methods	Qualitative content analysis, comparison, generalization	To interpret theoretical and practical findings scientifically	Comparison of competent and less-competent pedagogical practices
Ethical Principles	Voluntary participation, anonymity, professional respect, confidentiality	To ensure research conforms to ethical norms	Protection of children's and educators' rights, informed consent

Reliability and Validity	Cross-checking theoretical and empirical data	To ensure research reliability and credibility	Alignment of real pedagogical practices with academic sources
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Results and Discussion

The analysis of the reviewed literature revealed that professional competence in preschool teachers is a multidimensional construct comprising several interrelated components:

- Cognitive (theoretical) competence: Strong knowledge in pedagogy, psychology, and methodology (Aydin, 2020).
- Practical-methodological competence: Effective application of pedagogical methods and technologies (Tomlinson, 2014).
- Communicative competence: Ability to communicate effectively with children, parents, and colleagues (Hargie, 2011).
- Reflective competence: Ability to analyze personal teaching practices and pursue professional growth (Korthagen, 2004).
- Ethical-value competence: Adherence to
- teacher competence and professional effectiveness (Springer, 2025).

humanistic values and respect for children's rights (Noddings, 2005).
Figure 1: MM of Preschool Teacher Professional Competence



Empirical Findings

- Emotional competence and teaching performance: A study in China showed that preschool teachers’ emotional skills (empathy, self-regulation) significantly improved classroom performance (MDPI, 2022).
- Pedagogical 4.0 skills: Research in Indonesia found that innovation, creativity, and technology proficiency positively affected

Contextual Challenges

- Professional development limitations: In Azerbaijan, limited access to continuous training hinders teachers’ ability to fully

implement competence-based practices (Muallim.edu.az, 2023).

- Infrastructure constraints: Unequal resources in preschool institutions restrict innovative pedagogical applications and teacher growth.

Despite these positive tendencies, the results also highlight persistent systemic challenges. Limitations related to institutional infrastructure, unequal access to professional development, and gaps in continuous training impede the full implementation of competence-based educational approaches. Addressing these constraints is essential for ensuring that preschool teachers can consistently apply high-quality, evidence-based pedagogical strategies.

Conclusion

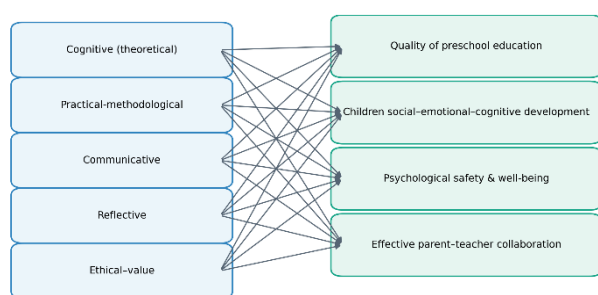
The study confirms that the professional competence of preschool teachers is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. Competence is an integrative synthesis of personal–moral qualities, professional attitudes, reflective thinking, and innovative pedagogical approaches. High levels of cognitive, practical-methodological, communicative, reflective, and ethical-value competencies directly influence the quality of pedagogical activity, teaching–learning effectiveness, and children’s holistic development.

A competence-based approach enhances preschool education quality, promotes psychological safety, supports creative pedagogical thinking, and strengthens parent-teacher collaboration. Continuous professional development and reflective practice remain essential for sustained improvement of teachers’ competence

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Figure 4: Competence–Outcomes Map



Modern preschool institutions require competent educators who support children’s development, cooperate as equal partners, professionally plan and adapt educational processes, and respond to real-time challenges.

Discussion

These findings demonstrate that the professional competence of preschool teachers is a multidimensional construct encompassing personal, pedagogical, communicative, reflective, and ethical dimensions. The analysis indicates that emotional competencies—such as empathy, self-regulation, and sensitive interaction—play a significant role in enhancing teachers’ effectiveness in classroom management and child engagement. Furthermore, the integration of innovative and developmentally appropriate pedagogical practices is shown to strengthen instructional quality and foster more meaningful learning experiences.

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