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The Reality of Professional Competency of Kindergarten Teachers in Banda Aceh Through the Use of Headmaster's Academic Supervision

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Article Information:

Received 04 17, 2024

Revised 04 14, 2025

Accepted 04 30, 2025

Keywords: Headmaster; Academic Supervision; Professional Competency

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify academic supervision including planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up process which had been done by the headmaster to improve the professional competency of kindergarten teachers in Banda Aceh. Descriptive qualitative had been used as an approach in this research. Observation, interview, and documentation were used as collecting data techniques. The data were analyzed by using descriptive qualitative with along with data reduction strategies, data visualization, and conclusion drawings. The research's conclusions revealed that: (1) the headmaster plans the academic supervision program to enhance learning and carries it out both inside and outside of the classroom; (2) Academic supervision is implemented in stages, starting with pre-observation, observation, evaluation, and follow-up, or problem-solving; (3) Individual and group evaluations are conducted regarding academic supervision. and (4) The outcomes of academic monitoring are further strengthened and improved, already meeting the requirements for teachers. The chance to attend training or grading is provided, as well as coaching and improvement for supervisory actions that have not yet reached the requisite standards.

How to cite: Nurhafni, N., Niswanto, N., Murniati, M., & Binti Zakaria, N. (2025). The reality of professional competency of kindergarten teachers in Banda Aceh through the use of headmaster's academic supervision. *Journal of Education, Teaching and Learning*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.26737/jetl.v10i1.5489>

INTRODUCTION

The quality of education is inseparable from the challenges of the future. As such, improving educational quality must begin from the earliest level of formal education—kindergarten. At this foundational stage, students are expected to develop into independent and creative learners (Hansen

& Ringsmose, 2023; H. Liu, 2021). However, the realization of these objectives is often hampered by various systemic challenges, including inadequate facilities, limited internet access, and most crucially, the suboptimal quality of kindergarten teachers and school leadership.

The declining quality of kindergarten teachers has been associated with low motivation levels, often exacerbated by the rapid and continuous transformation of the educational landscape (Xueli, 2021). Teachers frequently face barriers in the teaching and learning process without having sufficient institutional support or access to effective professional development programs (Chen et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2023). Although digital tools offer new opportunities for classroom innovation, excessive reliance on applications without pedagogical training can stifle creativity and reduce intrinsic motivation (Akbar & Tohar, 2021). Teachers are aware of the importance of continuous learning through experience and structured training (Z. R. Liu, 2024), underscoring the need for effective and responsive support systems within schools.

Another critical issue lies in the minimal involvement of parents in the learning process. Ideally, the development of children should be a shared responsibility between teachers at school and parents at home (Alam, 2024; Kambona, 2025). However, many parents delegate this role entirely to teachers, resulting in a lack of reinforcement of academic activities, such as reading, outside the classroom. This lack of continuity is detrimental, especially considering the role of repetition in early childhood learning (Corrado, 2025; Feng & Tan, 2023).

To address these multifaceted problems, the role of the school headmaster is vital. The headmaster is responsible for cultivating a supportive learning environment and fostering collaborative relationships between teachers and parents (van Vuuren & van der Bank, 2023). Moreover, effective headmasters are expected to demonstrate competencies in strategic planning, delegation of responsibilities, and facilitating professional dialogue among stakeholders to support school development (Haglund & Glaés-Coutts, 2023).

Central to the headmaster's leadership function is the implementation of academic supervision, which is instrumental in enhancing teacher competencies. Academic supervision must be approached as a structured and reflective process aimed at improving the pedagogical, theoretical, and practical skills of educators (Ahmad & Saefurrohman, 2020; Werdiningsih, 2024). Training initiatives embedded in supervision practices not only foster professional growth but also encourage collaborative engagement among teachers, allowing for the exchange of innovative teaching strategies (Carmo & Salis, 2024; Patrick, 2022b, 2022a).

Effective academic supervision requires purposeful planning, objectivity, and collegiality (Dumitru et al., 2024). Through this process, headmasters act as instructional leaders who mentor and support teachers while using supervision results as a mechanism to monitor and improve teaching quality (Arendse et al., 2024; Campuzano, 2023; Wiyono et al., 2022). Furthermore, supervision conducted periodically—ideally every three months—can provide sustained support for teacher development (Maritasari et al., 2020).

However, findings from a preliminary study conducted in several kindergartens in Banda Aceh indicate persistent problems. Many headmasters are not adequately performing academic supervision due to a lack of understanding of its procedures, inconsistent scheduling, and an inability to provide relevant follow-up training. These issues are often compounded by limited motivation and insufficient educational training provided by governmental institutions. This situation is especially concerning in Banda Aceh, a province with strong cultural values and

geographical proximity to Malaysia and Thailand, where comparative educational advancements could serve as external benchmarks.

The professional competence of kindergarten teachers is a critical factor in achieving high-quality education and optimal child development. Continuous professional development (CPD) has been widely recognized as a key strategy to enhance teachers' knowledge and teaching practices (X. Liu & Li, 2021). In this context, academic supervision by headmasters emerges as a pivotal mechanism for improving professional competencies. Evidence indicates that when academic supervision is implemented with clear procedures and adequate institutional support, it significantly contributes to teacher performance and student learning outcomes (Hidayati et al., 2025). Nevertheless, several barriers remain, including teacher resistance, overburdened school leadership, and lack of sustained post-supervision interventions (Ahmad & Saefurrohman, 2020).

Although numerous studies have examined academic supervision at the primary and secondary education levels, research focusing on kindergarten education, particularly in localized contexts such as Banda Aceh, remains scarce (Hidayati et al., 2025). Therefore, there is an urgent need to investigate how academic supervision can be adapted to address the specific needs of kindergarten teachers in this region. Such studies are essential for developing context-sensitive strategies that support professional development and enhance educational quality in early childhood education.

Theoretically, teacher professional development is an evolving process aimed at enriching educators' skills and competencies through holistic and sustained engagement (Lozančić, 2018). Practically, academic supervision serves as an effective tool to address complex instructional challenges, especially when accompanied by mentoring and hands-on training from experienced mentors (Simon & Dan, 2025). In the context of Banda Aceh, well-structured academic supervision has demonstrated positive effects on teacher performance and instructional quality.

Given the strategic role of headmasters in fostering educational transformation, and the critical importance of academic supervision in supporting teacher professional development, this study aims to analyze and describe the implementation of academic supervision in kindergartens across Banda Aceh. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the improvement of academic supervision models that are responsive to the local educational context and challenges.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore and understand the actual implementation of academic supervision conducted by headmasters in kindergartens across Banda Aceh. The case study design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth examination of a bounded system—specifically, the planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up stages of academic supervision—in its natural context. The case study approach is particularly suitable when the goal is to investigate complex social phenomena that are deeply embedded within a specific institutional and cultural setting, and when the researcher seeks to generate rich, context-specific insights rather than generalizable findings (Muzari et al., 2022). In this study, the unit of analysis is the academic supervision practice in selected kindergartens that have been identified as actively implementing structured supervision.

Research Participants and Sampling

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, which is appropriate when the researcher aims to select individuals who have specific knowledge and experience relevant to the phenomenon being studied. The study involved eleven participants from several kindergartens in Banda Aceh, including five headmasters, five teachers, and one school administrator. The selected schools—Banda Aceh State 6, Kartika IV-11, Region Government Area, Latifa, and Meutia Cut—had been identified as actively practicing academic supervision, thus providing rich data sources for analysis.

Data Collection Techniques

To obtain comprehensive and reliable data, the researchers utilized three primary techniques: semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. The semi-structured interviews were designed to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and reflections of the participants regarding academic supervision. Non-participant observations allowed researchers to observe classroom interactions and supervision practices in their natural setting without interfering. Meanwhile, document analysis focused on relevant school records such as supervision schedules, reports, and performance assessment sheets. These three techniques were selected to ensure data triangulation, enhancing the credibility of the findings by capturing the phenomenon from multiple perspectives.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analyzed using a thematic coding strategy, appropriate for case study research aiming to identify patterns and meanings within qualitative data. The analysis process began with verbatim transcription of all interviews and observation field notes. Researchers then engaged in inductive coding, where codes emerged from the data rather than being imposed in advance. Thematic categories were organized around the four main components of academic supervision: planning, implementation, evaluation, and follow-up. The process was informed by Miles and Huberman's interactive model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This approach enabled the researchers to go beyond surface descriptions and develop analytic insights that could explain variations in practices and outcomes.

RESULT

The findings of this study are presented thematically, based on the four main stages of academic supervision conducted by school principals: (1) Planning, (2) Implementation, (3) Evaluation, and (4) Follow-up. This thematic structure aims to provide a systematic and comprehensive overview of academic supervision practices in enhancing the professional competencies of kindergarten teachers in Banda Aceh. Each theme is analyzed using data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and is further enriched with direct quotations from participants to deepen and contextualize the descriptions.

Academic Supervision Planning

Planning is not only the first phase in academic supervision but also a defining moment that sets the tone for the rest of the academic year. In the context of kindergartens in Banda Aceh,

principals demonstrated a structured and thoughtful approach to supervision planning—grounded in the school calendar, tailored to teachers' needs, and responsive to classroom realities.

Most principals began the planning process by reviewing the educational policy updates, teacher competency profiles, and institutional development goals. From this, they created a supervision roadmap that included annual and semester programs, weekly activity schedules, lesson planning templates (RPP), and assessment instruments. The core aim was to ensure that teachers could design and deliver developmentally appropriate learning aligned with both early childhood education principles and national competency standards.

This commitment to strategic planning is reflected in a principal's explanation:

"At the beginning of each year, we sit together to draft our supervision plan. We set our targets clearly—what competencies we want our teachers to achieve, and what supporting activities such as trainings and classroom observations will help them get there." (Principal 1)

Rather than being a top-down directive, the planning process was collaborative. Senior teachers were often involved in drafting the plan, lending their experience to shape realistic timelines and priorities. Once finalized, the plan was formalized through a School Decree and distributed to all teachers as a working guide.

The process wasn't just administrative—it was strategic. For many schools, this phase laid the groundwork for a culture of accountability and continuous improvement. A teacher shared:

"I appreciate how the headmaster includes us from the start. We don't just receive instructions—we understand the why behind each part of the plan. That makes us more engaged." (Teacher 2)

This collaborative model reflects a leadership style that values shared responsibility, clear communication, and a long-term vision for professional growth. It marks a shift from supervisory planning as a routine task to a reflective, intentional act that empowers both leaders and teachers.

Implementation of Academic Supervision

The implementation of academic supervision in Banda Aceh kindergartens was conducted through both direct and indirect approaches, tailored to the unique characteristics and needs of each teacher. The headmaster played an active role in encouraging teachers to fulfill their professional responsibilities with discipline and commitment. Leadership practices were carried out in an open and democratic manner, including transparent distribution of responsibilities and decision-making processes that involved teacher input.

One teacher reflected on her experience by stating:

"During one observation, the headmaster didn't just sit at the back and take notes. After class, we had a very constructive discussion. She asked what challenges I faced when teaching phonics to the younger children, and then she shared tips from her own teaching experience." (Teacher 1)

This narrative indicates that academic supervision was not merely evaluative, but developmental in nature. The principal applied a supervision strategy grounded in psychological principles, recognizing the emotional and cognitive dynamics of teaching. This humanistic and dialogic approach made the supervision process more supportive rather than intimidating.

Another teacher explained:

“Sometimes, the headmaster doesn’t need to come into the classroom. In our teacher meetings, she listens to our stories and difficulties. I remember when I struggled with online teaching, she suggested I try simpler applications and even offered a mini-workshop for us.”
(Teacher 2)

Supervision methods included teacher meetings, classroom observations, training sessions, and activities within the Teacher Working Group (*Kelompok Kerja Guru*). These methods were selected flexibly, depending on the objectives of the supervision and the problems identified among teachers. For instance, when the goal was to improve lesson planning, the principal emphasized collaborative workshops. When classroom management was an issue, she preferred in-class observation and one-on-one coaching.

During classroom visits, the principal systematically observed the teaching and learning process from the beginning to the end of the session. The focus was placed on evaluating two main aspects: pedagogical and professional competency. The feedback process was always followed by reflection sessions, where teachers were encouraged to analyze their own teaching practices, share insights, and propose areas for self-improvement.

Table 1. Indicators of Pedagogical and Professional Competency

Pedagogical Competency	Professional Competency
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mastery of students' characteristics• Mastery of learning theories and principles• Mastery of curriculum• Educating development activities• Mastery of ICT for learning• Development of learner potential• Communication skills• Ability to evaluate learning• Utilization of learning outcome evaluation• Reflective actions and improvement in the learning quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mastery of scientific material• Mastery of competency standards• Development of learning materials• Development of sustainable professionalism• Utilization of ICT for communication and personal development

Table 1 presents the indicators used by school principals to assess teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies during academic supervision. Pedagogical competency includes the teacher's ability to understand students' characteristics, master learning theories and principles, and design learning activities appropriate to the developmental level of young children. It also involves communication skills, the ability to evaluate learning outcomes, and engaging in reflective practices for continuous improvement. Meanwhile, professional competency refers to the mastery of subject matter, understanding of competency standards, and the development of relevant teaching materials. Teachers are also expected to pursue ongoing professional development, including the effective use

of information and communication technology for both teaching and self-improvement. These indicators serve as essential references in academic supervision, as they reflect the overall quality of teachers in both instructional practice and continuous professional growth.

As part of the academic supervision process, the observation results conducted by the principal were systematically analyzed to assess teachers' achievements in both pedagogical and professional competency indicators. This assessment was based on supervision instruments developed by the school and documented in the official academic supervision report. The following data, taken from the supervision report for the 2022/2023 academic year, presents the average scores obtained by teachers on each indicator.

Table 2. Average Results of Academic Supervision on Pedagogical and Professional Competencies

Pedagogical Competency	Average Score	Professional Competency	Average Score
Understanding of students' characteristics	80	Mastery of scientific content	80
Mastery of learning theories and principles	90	Mastery of competency standards	90
Mastery of the curriculum	80	Development of instructional materials	90
Development of educational learning activities	93	Continuous professional development	90
ICT proficiency in teaching	88	Use of ICT for communication and personal development	92
Development of learners' potential	90		
Communication skills	95		
Ability to evaluate learning	90		
Utilization of learning evaluation results	90		
Reflective actions for improving teaching quality	90		

The data in Table 2 indicate that academic supervision has a positive impact on improving teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies. Overall, teachers performed well, particularly in communication skills (score of 95), development of educational activities (93), and use of ICT for communication and professional growth (92). However, there are several indicators that should be prioritized for evaluation and follow-up by the principal.

The lowest scores were found in the indicators understanding of students' characteristics and mastery of the curriculum, both of which scored 80. One teacher explained the challenges in understanding the dynamic behavior of students in the digital era:

“Students change quickly nowadays. One day they’re interested in something, and the next week it’s something completely different. I need more contextual guidance to understand them.” (Teacher 1)

Another area of concern was the mastery of scientific content, which also received a relatively low score (80). This may be attributed to the constant changes in the national curriculum. One teacher remarked:

“The material keeps changing, especially with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Sometimes we haven’t even mastered one topic before a new approach or revision comes along.” (Teacher 4)

Although ICT proficiency in teaching received a relatively good score (88), it still indicated that some teachers encountered difficulties in effectively integrating technology into their teaching. As one teacher stated:

“I’m still learning to use digital platforms. Often, I feel more comfortable with conventional teaching methods due to limited equipment and internet access at school.” (Teacher 2)

These findings suggest that while most teachers have shown significant improvement, there are still notable challenges in adapting to technology, keeping up with curriculum changes, and applying pedagogical strategies based on student characteristics. Therefore, it is important for school principals to design follow-up actions that focus on technical support, ongoing training, and professional development tailored to the actual needs of teachers.

Academic Supervision Evaluation Process

In the evaluation process, this research found that every month, on Saturdays, the teachers gathered to evaluate the academic supervision provided to them. During this meeting, the headmaster actively facilitated discussions, encouraging teachers to talk about the issues they had encountered in the past month. Some of the issues frequently discussed by the teachers included poor student performance on learning assessments, lack of student discipline, inappropriate learning resources used in the classroom, and other problems affecting the teaching and learning process.

One teacher explained the evaluation process:

“Every month, we meet to discuss the issues we face. We feel given the opportunity to talk about what’s lacking and to find solutions together with the headmaster.” (Teacher 5)

In these meetings, the headmaster primarily acted as a facilitator, leading the discussion and providing guidance based on the problems brought up by the teachers. For example, issues related to low student performance in assessments were openly discussed, and the headmaster gave instructions regarding teaching methods that could improve student understanding. Additionally, solutions for student discipline issues were provided, such as suggesting the implementation of more character-based approaches and closer monitoring.

“The headmaster suggested that we use more creative approaches to capture students’ attention, such as using technology or project-based learning methods.” (Teacher 6)

Furthermore, the headmaster instructed the teachers to be more selective in choosing appropriate learning resources in line with the curriculum and the characteristics of the students, particularly in utilizing technology. Instructions regarding the selection of more relevant and contextual teaching materials were also given to ensure that teaching and learning processes became more effective.

The issue of inappropriate learning resources also received special attention. The headmaster asked the teachers to frequently share teaching materials and experiences among themselves, either through Teacher Working Groups (KKG) or internal training sessions.

"We were asked to be more creative in finding teaching materials. The headmaster also encouraged us to keep learning and sharing knowledge with each other so we could enrich the materials we teach." (Teacher 7)

Follow-Up Actions

These evaluation results show that the headmaster plays not only the role of an evaluator but also a mediator who listens to complaints and provides practical solutions. With the routine evaluation forum, the headmaster is able to give relevant and in-depth instructions according to the issues at hand, while also guiding teachers to focus on improving teaching quality.

However, despite the successful evaluation process and follow-up actions, there are still aspects that need further attention. One of these is the need for enhanced support in training teachers on the use of educational technology and selecting more innovative learning resources to improve student performance. The headmaster could further maximize the development process by strengthening training sessions and providing more frequent opportunities for teachers to share experiences.

DISCUSSION

The headmaster's ability to develop kindergarten instructors depends on his ability to select and apply academic supervision precisely. The head of the school may exercise his leadership in a variety of ways. The goal of supervision is to ensure that the teacher is meeting the needs of kindergarten-level pupils both inside and outside of the classroom when implementing lessons. The purpose of this academic supervision is similar to many studies done by (Green et al., 2024; Ivagher et al., 2021; LaBrot et al., 2024; Nesbitt et al., 2025) where they found that academic supervision should be done by headmaster as a monitor of teaching and learning process then it is needed to be objective, well prepared and cooperative.

The initial task assigned to the headmaster was to prepare the academic monitoring plan for the Kindergarten in Banda Aceh City, which was completed after every academic year. Setting objectives to enhance the teacher's capacity to oversee learning—from organizing, carrying out, and assessing learning outcomes—formed the basis of academic supervision planning. To establish a setting that can assist the accomplishment of the educational objectives, the supervision makes every effort to build and develop the elements that already exist in the learning environment. This finding is in line with the prior work stated that a comfortable and educated environment is needed to build education, especially for kindergarten schools (Alkaabi, 2023; Herman & Khalaf, 2023). The way how the headmaster arranged the academic supervision plan is supported by the previous research said that the number of academic supervision and the way to achieve good

academic supervision must be clarified and structured by the headmasters to give good quality of teacher's professional development and competency (Suherman et al., 2020).

The implementation of academic supervision began with democracy and transparency which could be the same as the statement. If there is a discipline infraction, the principal usually notifies the instructor. The leader tried to explain this as well at the moment of the split. The way the headmasters try to focus on the teachers in doing academic supervision is supported by prior work showed that teacher is the main focus of teaching and learning process (Herman & Khalaf, 2023; Welsh, 2024). They need to be analyze and enhance to find their ability in teaching by using collaborative system (Welsh, 2023; Zhou et al., 2023).

Moreover, in implementing academic supervision, the headmaster always provided the discussion to share and change the ideas to solve the problems between the teachers, headmasters even the parents. It is supported by prior work stating that the discussion is needed to find one thought in solving the problems and idea to achieve the progress of the teaching and learning process (He et al., 2023). The involvement of parents in process of academic supervision is similar to the finding of previous study proved that teachers and parents are a team work to build successful learning not only in the school, but also in the home by doing a repetition (Dyantyi & Gqoli, 2025; Gamez et al., 2024; Iurea, 2024).

The teachers might accept different tasks based on the needs and capabilities of the teachers then after that there is always the target and the deadline to be evaluated. These implementations are similar to the studies which had been done by Urban et al. (2024) and Papaevangelou et al. (2024) in which the headmaster should divide the specific tasks and there is workforce planning in the evaluation process. The evaluation findings will provide information on the degree of completion of a specific task, allowing for the identification of any discrepancies between the achieved outcomes and the standard that was set.

The evaluation stage of academic supervision also delivered the information about the problems and barriers faced by the teachers such as lack ability of technology, low pedagogical competency or being addicted and lost controlled of using some application for the teaching and learning process. So, it could show how need teachers in evaluation process are. These could be similar to previous studies stated that the teachers require many evaluations process therefore they know where they are and they could learn from the result of evaluation to elevate their professional development (Shilibekova et al., 2025; Tep, 2024).

The result of the evaluation process should be continued with the followed-up process by the headmaster. The follow-up process has function to provide sufficient training and problem solving about the teacher's problem. This finding could be a contra for the finding of previous studies stated that the teachers do not accept sufficient training after the evaluation process Sartain and Morris (2024) so they do not have any idea in solving some problems of teaching and learning process (Shilibekova et al., 2025). The follow process of academic supervision enhances teachers' capacity to oversee learning processes, particularly for those who struggle with putting what they have learned into practice. This is similar to the purpose of academic supervision could be the most important thing to achieve and break the challenge in making independent and creative learners of kindergarten.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that academic supervision is systematically planned and conducted in a constructive manner, with a focus on teacher development rather than fault-finding. The school principal applies democratic, objective, and sustainable principles, using a combination of direct and indirect supervision approaches, such as teacher meetings, classroom visits, and training sessions. These practices not only contribute to teachers' professional growth but also foster a collaborative environment. Evaluation of the program ensures that goals are met and discrepancies are addressed, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of education through continuous feedback and oversight.

Theoretical implications suggest that academic supervision plays a key role in improving teacher competence and aligns with leadership theories that emphasize collaboration and professional development. Practically, the study highlights the importance of structured supervision in fostering teacher growth and improving teaching quality. Limitations of the study include its reliance on qualitative data and a small sample size, which may limit generalizability. Future research should explore a broader, more diverse sample and consider the long-term impact of academic supervision on teaching and student outcomes, as well as the influence of external factors such as policies and resources.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to the content of this manuscript. All co-authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript. Furthermore, the authors affirm that there are no financial interests to disclose. This manuscript is original and has not been submitted for publication elsewhere.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Nurhafni and Niswanto conceptualized the research idea and developed the theoretical framework. Murniati was responsible for data collection and initial analysis. Nurhijrah Binti Zakaria provided expert guidance, contributed to the interpretation of findings, and supervised the overall research process. All authors actively discussed the results and contributed to writing and refining the final manuscript.

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