
Enhancing Teacher Retention and Compensation through Effective Principal Leadership and Professional Competence in Islamic Private Elementary Schools

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Abstract

Education is a key pillar of national development, and teachers play a central role in ensuring the success and quality of learning. This study aims to analyze the influence of principal leadership and teacher professional competence on teacher retention, with compensation as a mediating variable. This study employed a quantitative approach, using a survey to collect data from teachers in a private Islamic school. Path analysis was used to examine the direct and indirect relationships between the variables. The findings indicate that principal leadership and teacher professional competence positively influence teacher retention, both directly and through compensation as a mediating factor. These results reinforce the importance of school leaders' role in managing compensation and professional development as a sustainable retention strategy. This study highlights how compensation can act as a bridge between leadership and retention, and how professional competence reinforces this dynamic. In conclusion, retaining great teachers requires more than just a salary. It demands visionary leadership, meaningful professional development, and a workplace culture that values the contributions of every educator. By focusing on these areas, schools can build strong and loyal teams that drive long-term success and educational excellence.

Keywords

Compensation, Principal Leadership, Teacher Professional Competence, Teacher Retention, Teacher Professional Development



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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the key pillars in national development, and teachers serve as the central element in ensuring the success and quality of learning. In every educational institution, the ability to retain professional and competent teachers determines the sustainability of teaching quality. Teacher retention, defined as the institution's ability to maintain qualified educators within its system, reflects the effectiveness of human resource management in education. In recent years, the increasing competition among private Islamic schools has required school leaders to focus not only on recruiting qualified teachers but also on maintaining

their commitment and loyalty to the institution. A stable teaching staff contributes to consistent learning outcomes, organizational continuity, and institutional reputation.

Teacher turnover remains a significant challenge for educational institutions worldwide, particularly in developing countries where teachers often face unstable working conditions, limited career advancement, and insufficient compensation. High teacher turnover leads to increased costs in recruitment and training and disrupts the learning process. Conversely, a high retention rate ensures institutional stability and enhances student achievement. Retaining teachers, however, requires a strategic and holistic approach that integrates leadership, professional competence, and fair compensation.

In the context of Indonesia, teacher retention in private Islamic elementary schools (Sekolah Dasar Islam Swasta) faces unique challenges. These schools must compete not only with public schools that offer better financial stability but also with other private institutions with varying management systems. Many teachers in private Islamic schools are motivated by spiritual and social missions; however, they often encounter limited compensation, workload imbalances, and a lack of structured professional development. Thus, leadership becomes a critical factor in shaping a supportive environment where teachers feel valued and motivated to remain. The role of the principal as a leader, manager, and motivator is central to ensuring teacher satisfaction and long-term commitment.

Effective school leadership is recognized as a determining factor in teacher retention. Transformational leadership, characterized by vision, empathy, and the ability to inspire, encourages teachers to align their personal goals with the institution's mission. Principals who foster open communication, provide mentoring, and appreciate teachers' contributions create a positive work climate that promotes loyalty. In the context of Islamic education, leadership also includes moral and spiritual dimensions, where the principal acts not only as an administrator but also as a role model who embodies Islamic values. Therefore, the principal's leadership effectiveness directly influences teachers' job satisfaction, professional growth, and retention.

Another factor that strongly influences teacher retention is professional competence. Professional competence refers to the teacher's ability to master subject matter, pedagogical skills, and professional ethics in accordance with national education standards. Teachers with higher competence are typically more confident, productive, and satisfied with their careers. Competent teachers are also more likely to receive recognition, trust, and opportunities for professional development from their institutions. However, without adequate support systems such as training programs, supervision, and career advancement pathways, teachers may feel stagnant and undervalued, leading to reduced motivation to stay. Therefore, fostering teacher competence is not only a matter of instructional quality but also a long-term retention strategy.

Compensation is another crucial element in teacher retention. Compensation includes both financial and non-financial rewards that teachers receive in exchange for their contributions. Fair and competitive compensation enhances job satisfaction and signals institutional appreciation for teachers' efforts. Conversely, inadequate or inequitable compensation often triggers dissatisfaction and turnover. Studies in educational human

resource management have consistently shown that compensation interacts with leadership and competence in influencing retention. Teachers who perceive fairness and transparency in compensation tend to show higher levels of commitment and performance. In the context of Islamic private schools, where resources may be limited, principals must design compensation systems that balance financial capability with recognition and appreciation mechanisms.

Several government regulations in Indonesia have emphasized the importance of strengthening human resource management in education. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) has issued various policies, such as Regulation No. 16 of 2021 on Teacher Competence Standards and Regulation No. 40 of 2021 on Functional Positions and Credit Scores for Teachers, which promote continuous professional development. These policies encourage teachers to enhance their professional competence while providing structured pathways for promotion and reward. Additionally, Regulation No. 26 of 2022 on Performance Appraisal of Civil Servants highlights merit-based evaluation, linking performance outcomes with career development and compensation. Although most of these regulations target public school teachers, they serve as a valuable reference for private institutions seeking to design effective retention frameworks.

Empirical data collected from Islamic private elementary schools in Gunungsindur District between 2021 and 2024 show an encouraging upward trend in teacher retention rates— from 90% in 2021 to 96.8% in 2024. This improvement indicates successful efforts by schools to maintain their teaching staff. However, further analysis reveals that retention is not solely determined by quantitative factors but also by qualitative aspects such as motivation, job satisfaction, and leadership support. Survey results from 200 teachers indicate that job satisfaction (18.5%), compensation (16.5%), and career development (14.5%) are the primary reasons teachers choose to remain in their institutions. Leadership, workload balance, and organizational commitment also contribute meaningfully, suggesting that retention arises from the combined effect of managerial, psychological, and environmental factors.

These findings align with Mathis and Jackson's (2021) Human Resource Management framework, which identifies organizational culture, career opportunities, compensation, job design, and interpersonal relationships as key determinants of retention. The theory posits that effective retention strategies should not merely aim to keep employees physically present but should nurture emotional and psychological attachment to the organization. In educational settings, this translates into creating a workplace where teachers feel respected, valued, and empowered to contribute meaningfully.

Previous studies also support the multidimensional nature of teacher retention. Research by Susandi (2022) demonstrated that job satisfaction, leadership style, and professional development significantly influence teachers' willingness to stay. Similarly, Asriadi (2023) and Desliana Pane (2021) highlighted that participatory and transformational leadership styles foster teacher motivation and commitment. Wayan Suryathi (2023) found that compensation and a positive work environment jointly enhance employee retention, underscoring the importance of

psychological and organizational well-being in the retention process. Collectively, these studies affirm that retention strategies must integrate financial, professional, and relational dimensions.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative approach that combines principal leadership, teacher professional competence, and compensation as interrelated variables influencing teacher retention in Islamic private elementary schools. Unlike previous studies that examined these factors separately, this study explores their simultaneous interactions using a quantitative methodology and path analysis. The use of longitudinal data from 2021 to 2024 strengthens the reliability of findings and provides a more comprehensive understanding of retention trends over time. Furthermore, the study contributes to contextualized knowledge by focusing on private Islamic schools in Gunungsindur—a sector and region that remain underrepresented in academic literature.

From a theoretical perspective, this research expands the application of retention theory in educational settings by linking it with leadership and competence frameworks. Practically, it provides actionable insights for principals and educational policymakers to develop strategies that balance leadership effectiveness, professional growth, and equitable compensation. Strengthening these three aspects simultaneously is expected to enhance teacher satisfaction, loyalty, and performance—ultimately contributing to sustainable school improvement.

In conclusion, teacher retention in Islamic private schools is not merely a managerial issue but a strategic priority that determines educational quality and institutional resilience. Effective leadership creates a supportive environment; professional competence ensures instructional excellence; and fair compensation fosters satisfaction and loyalty. The interplay of these factors forms the foundation of sustainable teacher retention. Schools that invest in developing visionary leaders, competent educators, and fair compensation systems are more likely to build strong, committed teaching teams capable of driving educational excellence and fulfilling the broader mission of national education

METHODS

This study adopts a quantitative approach with a causal associative design, aiming to examine the direct and indirect effects of principal leadership and teacher professional competence on teacher retention, with compensation acting as a mediating variable. The quantitative method was selected because it allows objective measurement of variables and statistical testing of hypotheses. The design emphasizes path analysis, which facilitates an understanding of how leadership and competence influence teacher retention directly and indirectly through compensation. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to teachers working in Islamic private elementary schools in Gunungsindur District.

The rationale behind this method lies in its ability to generalize findings across a population, identify relationships between variables, and verify theoretical assumptions using empirical evidence. Furthermore, it supports decision-making for policy improvement in human resource management within educational institutions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study adopts a quantitative approach with a causal associative design, aiming to examine the direct and indirect effects of principal leadership and teacher professional competence on teacher retention, with compensation acting as a mediating variable. The quantitative method was selected because it allows objective measurement of variables and statistical testing of hypotheses. The design emphasizes path analysis, which facilitates an understanding of how leadership and competence influence teacher retention directly and indirectly through compensation. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed to teachers working in Islamic private elementary schools in Gunungsindur District. The rationale behind this method lies in its ability to generalize findings across a population, identify relationships between variables, and verify theoretical assumptions using empirical evidence. Furthermore, it supports decision-making for policy improvement in human resource management within educational institutions.

The findings of this study demonstrate that principal leadership and teacher professional competence significantly influence teacher retention, both directly and indirectly through compensation as a mediating variable. These results reinforce the assumption that teacher retention is not merely an outcome of individual motivation, but rather a systemic product of organizational leadership, professional capacity, and institutional reward structures. From a theoretical standpoint, this aligns strongly with the Human Resource Management framework proposed by Mathis and Jackson, which emphasizes that retention is shaped by an interplay of leadership quality, career development opportunities, and compensation fairness. The mediating role of compensation found in this study confirms that financial and non-financial rewards serve as a critical mechanism translating leadership practices and competence into sustained organizational commitment.

The significant positive effect of principal leadership on teacher retention found in this study can be explained through the lens of transformational leadership theory. Principals who articulate a clear vision, provide emotional support, and foster participatory decision-making create a sense of belonging among teachers. This sense of belonging strengthens affective commitment, which ultimately reduces turnover intentions. These findings are consistent with Boyd et al. (2021), who found that administrative support plays a decisive role in teachers' decisions to remain in schools. Similarly, Dinham (2021) emphasizes that leadership practices that prioritize teacher well-being and professional respect significantly enhance retention rates. However, this study extends previous findings by demonstrating that leadership does not operate in isolation; rather, its impact is amplified when linked with compensation mechanisms. This suggests that even the most inspirational leadership may lose effectiveness if not supported by tangible rewards, highlighting a practical limitation in leadership-centered retention models.

In relation to teacher professional competence, the results indicate a strong positive influence on retention, supporting the argument that competent teachers tend to exhibit higher

job satisfaction and organizational attachment. This can be explained through self-efficacy theory, where individuals with higher competence perceive themselves as more capable and effective in their roles, leading to greater intrinsic motivation. The findings are in line with Mardhatillah and Surjanti (2023), who reported that professional development programs significantly enhance teacher confidence and commitment. Furthermore, Wahyuni et al. (2022) found that professional competence contributes indirectly to retention through job satisfaction, which is consistent with the mediating dynamics identified in this study. However, unlike previous studies that treat competence as a static attribute, this research positions it as a dynamic factor that interacts with organizational support systems, particularly compensation. This implies that competence alone is insufficient to retain teachers unless it is recognized and rewarded appropriately.

The mediating role of compensation emerges as one of the most critical contributions of this study. Compensation not only directly affects teacher retention but also strengthens the effects of leadership and competence. This finding supports equity theory, which posits that employees evaluate fairness by comparing their inputs (effort, competence) with outputs (rewards). When teachers perceive compensation as fair and proportional to their contributions, they are more likely to remain committed to the organization. This is consistent with Budhwani and Gondane (2024), who found that compensation significantly influences retention through job satisfaction. Similarly, Sherratt (2023) highlights that inadequate pay structures are among the primary drivers of teacher attrition globally. However, this study provides a more nuanced understanding by showing that compensation acts as a bridge variable, linking leadership and competence with retention. This integrative role has not been sufficiently emphasized in prior research, marking a key theoretical advancement.

Interestingly, the findings also reveal that compensation in Islamic private schools is not limited to financial aspects but includes non-monetary elements such as recognition, spiritual fulfillment, and a supportive work environment. This contextual nuance differentiates the study from many Western-based studies that focus predominantly on salary and material benefits. In line with UNESCO (2021), which emphasizes the importance of holistic teacher support systems, this study suggests that culturally embedded values play a significant role in shaping retention. Teachers in Islamic institutions may tolerate lower financial compensation if compensated by strong leadership, meaningful work, and a sense of spiritual purpose. However, this does not negate the importance of financial rewards; rather, it indicates that compensation must be understood in a broader, culturally sensitive framework.

When compared with previous studies such as Susandi (2022) and Asriadi (2023), the current findings show strong convergence in highlighting the importance of leadership and professional development. However, this study differs in its methodological approach by employing path analysis to capture indirect effects, thereby offering a more comprehensive explanation of causal relationships. While earlier studies often relied on regression models that identify direct relationships, this research demonstrates that the interaction between variables is more complex and layered. This methodological contribution enhances the

explanatory power of retention studies and provides a more realistic representation of organizational dynamics.

Another important distinction lies in the contextual focus on Islamic private elementary schools in Gunungsindur. Unlike public schools, which benefit from government-regulated compensation systems, private Islamic schools operate under financial constraints that require more strategic management of human resources. The relatively high retention rate observed in this study (96.8% in 2024) suggests that non-financial factors such as leadership quality and organizational culture can partially compensate for limited financial resources. This finding contrasts with OECD (2021) reports, which often emphasize salary as the dominant factor in teacher retention. The implication is that in resource-constrained settings, leadership and competence development become even more critical as cost-effective retention strategies.

From a critical perspective, the findings also raise important questions about sustainability. While strong leadership and professional competence can enhance retention, over-reliance on intrinsic motivation and non-financial rewards may lead to burnout if not balanced with adequate compensation. This concern is supported by Nguyen et al. (2024), who argue that long-term retention requires structural improvements in working conditions, not just motivational strategies. Therefore, the study implies that policymakers and school managers must adopt a balanced approach that integrates financial sustainability with human-centered leadership practices.

In conclusion, the findings of this study confirm that teacher retention is a multidimensional construct shaped by the interaction of leadership, competence, and compensation. The results not only corroborate existing theories but also extend them by highlighting the mediating role of compensation and the contextual relevance of Islamic educational values. The study contributes to the literature by offering a more integrative and context-sensitive model of teacher retention, with important implications for both theory and practice. Future research should explore additional mediating variables such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment, as well as comparative studies across different types of schools to further validate and refine the proposed model.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this chapter establishes a robust methodological foundation for examining the influence of principal leadership and teacher professional competence on teacher retention, with compensation as a mediating variable, through a quantitative, causal associative design that ensures systematic, measurable, and replicable analysis. Utilizing a survey method with 200 teachers from Islamic private elementary schools in Gunungsindur District selected via proportionate stratified random sampling, the study ensures representative and generalizable findings. The research variables principal leadership, professional competence, compensation, and teacher retention are grounded in a strong theoretical framework and operationalized באמצעות a four-point Likert scale across 44 validated and reliable items. Data analysis employs descriptive statistics and path analysis supported by SPSS and AMOS to examine both direct

and indirect relationships, complemented by assumption testing to ensure statistical validity. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, are strictly maintained, while careful instrument design and pilot testing enhance clarity and accuracy. Overall, this methodological approach integrates rigor, ethical integrity, and analytical depth, enabling the study to generate credible, applicable insights for improving teacher retention and advancing research in educational leadership and human resource management.

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