Article

Teacher Competence Based on National Education Standards as a Pillar of Quality Learning: A Theoretical Analysis for Elementary Schools in Indonesia

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A B S T R A C T

Primary education is a crucial phase in shaping students' intelligence, character, and morality. Its quality is largely determined by the role of professional and competent teachers. This article aims to theoretically analyze the role of teacher competence based on the National Education Standards (SNP) as a pillar of quality learning in elementary schools. Although numerous studies discuss teacher competence and its impact on learning quality, research that specifically positions the SNP as the primary analytical framework for evaluating teacher competence in elementary schools remains very limited. This study employs a literature review approach with a theoretical-qualitative analysis method, drawing on legal sources, national literature, and international research findings from 2015 to 2025. The findings show that the four teacher competencies in the SNP (pedagogical, personal, social, and professional) play a strategic role in creating effective, humanistic, and innovative learning. Pedagogical competence supports student-centered learning, personal competence shapes exemplary behavior, social competence fosters inclusive interaction, and professional competence enhances subject mastery and teaching creativity. International studies reinforce that the integration of these four competencies positively impacts students' learning motivation and achievement. This study emphasizes the importance of strengthening continuous teacher training and implementing evidence-based policies to develop professional teachers with global competitiveness.
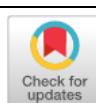
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INTRODUCTION

Primary education serves as the fundamental foundation for developing the quality of a nation's human resources (L. Astika et al., 2024; A. Nurul Faratunnisa et al., 2024; F. Island et al., 2021; N. A. Winingsih, 2024; H. Sucahyani & I. Anisah, 2019). At this stage, students are in their most critical period of cognitive, affective, social, and moral development. Basic education not only functions as a means of knowledge transfer but also instills character values, social skills, and critical thinking abilities that form the basis for lifelong learning. UNESCO (2020) reported that more than 60% of long-term learning outcomes are formed in early education, emphasizing the dominant role of primary school learning quality. Supporting this, Indonesia's PISA 2022 results indicate that 70% of students are still below the minimum proficiency level in mathematics and 58% in reading, demonstrating the urgent need to strengthen foundational learning at the primary level (OECD, 2023). Similarly, TIMSS 2019 reported that Indonesian fourth graders scored 397 in mathematics and 397 in science — significantly below the international average of 500 (IEA, 2020).

Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System emphasizes that basic education aims to develop students' potential to become faithful, pious, noble, capable, creative, and independent individuals. Therefore, the quality of basic education

implementation plays a decisive role in determining the overall success of national education (P. Endang, 2022; Slamet Winaryo, 2020; M. Khoirul, 2020; G. F. Hazimah, 2022). Supporting this, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud, 2021) found that schools with strong implementation of national standards have student performance levels 30–45% higher on national assessments. ANBK 2022 data further reveal that only 38% of elementary students achieved proficiency in literacy and only 34% in numeracy, indicating that many primary schools still struggle to meet national learning standards (Kemendikbud, 2022).

In this context, teachers hold a strategic position as the main actors in the success of the learning process. Teachers are not only conveyors of knowledge but also designers, managers, facilitators, and moral role models for students. The quality of education cannot surpass the quality of the teachers themselves (L. Zulkarnain, 2023; S. I. Basyori, 2025; Y. Arsini et al., 2023; M. Judrah et al., 2024; Afriantoni, D. N. Azizah & W. R. Ayu, 2025). Empirical findings show that teacher quality accounts for up to 35% of the variance in student achievement higher than curriculum, facilities, or school leadership (Hattie, 2018). In Indonesia, the World Bank (2020) found that students taught by teachers with high pedagogical competency scores performed 20–25% better in literacy and numeracy assessments compared to those taught by teachers with low competency scores.

To ensure this quality, the Indonesian government has established the National Education Standards (SNP), which include eight main components: standards for content, process, graduate competence, educators and education personnel, facilities and infrastructure, management, financing, and educational assessment (Law No. 20 of 2003). Among these standards, the Standard for Educators and Education Personnel hold a strategic position because it is directly related to the quality of learning. This standard stipulates the required academic qualifications and identifies four core teacher competencies: pedagogical, personal, social, and professional (Regulation of the Minister of National Education No. 16 of 2007).

However, amid globalization and digital transformation, the paradigm of teacher competence has become increasingly complex. Twenty-first century teachers are not only required to master subject matter and instructional strategies but also to possess digital literacy, reflective thinking, collaboration skills, innovation, and an orientation toward contextual and humanistic learning (OECD, 2021). Modern teachers serve as learning designers capable of creating adaptive learning experiences through effective use of technology (S. Winaryo et al., 2021; Lumbanraja et al., 2020; M. T. Ali, S. Winaryo & Sumarnie, 2021). OECD's TALIS survey (2021) shows that students taught by digitally competent teachers score 25–35% higher on problem-solving assessments. In Indonesia, the Learning Loss Study (World Bank & Kemendikbud, 2021) documented that effective use of digital tools by teachers during post-pandemic recovery improved student outcomes by up to 0.24 standard deviations.

Recent studies reaffirm the importance of teacher competence in enhancing learning quality. Kurniawan et al. (2023) demonstrated that improving pedagogical and professional competence significantly influences students' learning outcomes (A. A. Kurniawan et al., 2024; R. F. Valentino & Iskandar, 2020; H. Rahmawati & F. Solihah, 2023; M. M. Jelita et al., 2024; M. Ramadhani et al., 2025; I. Indrawan et al., 2025). International evidence confirms that teacher socio-emotional competence increases student engagement by up to 22% and reduces classroom disruptions by 15% (Triggs & Leat, 2020). Nevertheless, national research indicates that there remains a gap between the competency requirements outlined in the SNP and actual teaching practices in the field, particularly in primary schools located in underdeveloped, remote, and frontier regions (Rahmawati, 2024). A 2022 survey by Kemendikbud also shows that 48% of elementary teachers still fall below the minimum competency standards in pedagogical knowledge, which correlates strongly with lower student achievement in ANBK.

METHOD

This study employs a library research approach using a theoretical-analytical method. This approach is intended to examine, review, and synthesize various theories, policies, and previous research findings related to teacher competence as outlined in the National Education Standards (SNP). It was selected because it enables a comprehensive and in-depth conceptual understanding of the strategic role of teacher competence in improving the quality of learning in primary schools.

Overall, this research is qualitative and descriptive, emphasizing the exploration of meanings and concepts rather than numerical measurement. The primary data sources are organized into three major categories: (1) national policy documents such as Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Minister of National Education Regulation No. 16 of 2007 on Academic Qualifications and Teacher Competencies, and the most recent SNP documents; (2) national and international scholarly literature; and (3) empirical studies examining teacher competence, learning quality, and basic education policies in Indonesia.

The selection of legal documents was based on their juridical authority and relevance in regulating the framework of teacher competence within the national education system. National literature was chosen through a screening process of accredited journals, academic books, and reputable national publications issued between 2015 and 2025. Meanwhile, international studies were sourced from well-established databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, OECD, UNESCO, and IEA, using inclusion criteria that emphasized conceptual relevance, methodological rigor, and alignment with the four competencies mandated in the SNP.

Data collection was conducted through document analysis and systematic literature searches using keywords such as teacher competence, National Education Standards, learning quality, and primary education in Indonesia. Data were analyzed using content analysis, which involved three key stages: data reduction, data classification based on the four teacher competencies, and conceptual synthesis. This process was undertaken to build a comprehensive theoretical understanding of the central role of teacher competence in enhancing learning quality.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the literature review indicate that teacher competence based on the National Education Standards (SNP) serves as the fundamental foundation for building a quality learning system in elementary schools. Teacher competence is not merely an indicator of professionalism but also a strategic instrument for realizing the goals of national education as stated in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System.

The four core teacher competencies pedagogical, personal, social, and professional function as mutually reinforcing pillars that create an effective, humanistic, and student-centered learning ecosystem. Findings from various sources show that the success of learning in elementary schools largely depends on the extent to which teachers integrate these four competencies synergistically and contextually.

Pedagogical Competence as the Main Pillar of Learning Quality

Pedagogical competence reflects a teacher's ability to understand students' characteristics, design relevant learning activities, and conduct continuous assessment. According to Regulation of the Minister of National Education No. 16 of 2007, this aspect represents the core of the teaching profession, as it directly relates to the quality of classroom learning processes. Kurniawan et al. (2023) found that teachers with high pedagogical competence are able to enhance students' active participation and learning outcomes, particularly in Mathematics and Science subjects [24]. Teachers with strong pedagogical abilities are also proven to be more creative in utilizing digital and project-based learning media.

Meanwhile, a study by Tran & Nguyen (2023) in Vietnam emphasized the importance of pedagogical adaptability. The teacher's ability to adjust learning approaches according to

social context, technological readiness, and students' individual needs. This adaptability is a defining characteristic of 21st-century teachers, where learning no longer focuses solely on knowledge transmission but also on developing critical, collaborative, and reflective thinking skills.

Theoretically, this aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, which asserts that learning becomes meaningful when teachers act as facilitators within students' zone of proximal development. Teachers with high pedagogical competence can bridge the gap between students' potential and their actual performance, thereby making the learning process personalized, contextual, and meaningful.

Personal Competence: The Pillar of Teacher Integrity and Role Modeling

Personal competence emphasizes that teachers are not merely instructors but also moral and spiritual role models for their students. At the elementary school level, where children are in the crucial stage of character formation, teachers' exemplary behavior serves as the primary source of positive values and conduct. Sujana and Ratnawati (2022) found that teachers with high integrity, empathy, and a strong sense of moral responsibility have a direct influence on students' learning motivation and discipline. Students who emulate their teachers' personalities tend to exhibit greater prosocial behavior, self-confidence, and enthusiasm for learning.

These findings align with an international study by Collie, Shapka, and Perry (2021), which affirmed that teachers' social-emotional competence contributes to teacher well-being and a positive classroom climate. Emotionally stable teachers are better able to build empathetic relationships with students, manage stress, and prevent professional burnout.

In the Indonesian context, the dimension of teacher personality also aligns with the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Pancasila Student Profile), which requires teachers to serve as models of religiosity, nationalism, and mutual cooperation (gotong royong). Thus, personal competence is not only individual in nature but also ideological, representing national values within educational practice.

Social Competence: The Pillar of Communication and Educational Collaboration

Social competence reflects a teacher's ability to build effective and collaborative communication with students, colleagues, parents, and the wider community. Teachers with strong social competence serve as bridges connecting students' real-world experiences with the world of learning. Lestari and Firmansyah (2023) in West Java found that teachers who demonstrate empathetic and open communication skills are able to create a supportive classroom climate that enhances students' learning motivation.

At the international level, a study by Knezović et al. (2025) in Croatia revealed that teachers' social and emotional competencies are associated with increased self-efficacy and better stress management. Teachers who cultivate healthy social relationships also tend to be more resilient to the pressures of dynamic educational policies.

This connection can be explained through Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which posits that learning is the result of interactions between individuals and their environments. Within this context, teachers act as agents of connectivity, linking various social systems surrounding students to create a harmonious and inclusive learning ecosystem.

Professional Competence: The Pillar of Expertise and Mastery of Knowledge

Professional competence relates to mastery of subject matter, the structure of instructional content, and the application of appropriate teaching methodologies. A professional teacher not only understands what to teach but also how to teach it effectively. Rahmawati (2024) found that teachers with high professional competence are able to integrate innovative approaches such as project-based learning and technology-enhanced instruction to improve student learning outcomes. Professional teachers are also capable of reflecting on their teaching practices to continuously refine instructional strategies.

Globally, the OECD (Schleicher, 2020) in The Future of Education and Skills 2030 report highlights that professional teachers act as learning designers, capable of creating learning experiences that are relevant, collaborative, and contextual. Professionalism is no longer

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measured merely by formal qualifications, but by teachers' reflective, adaptive, and continuous development capacities. Consequently, professional teachers must become lifelong learners, actively engaging in training, research, and professional learning communities to maintain the relevance of their competencies in the digital era.

Table 1. Synthesis of Literature Review Findings on Teacher Competence and Learning Quality

No	Source / Literature	Focus of Study	Main Findings	Relevance to Teacher Competence Based on National Education Standards (SNP)
1	Mulyasa (2019)	Pedagogical and professional competence	Teachers with strong pedagogical competence create active and meaningful learning	Strengthens the pedagogical dimension as the foundation of effective teaching
2	OECD (2020)	Global teacher professionalism	Teachers' professional competence is directly related to learning effectiveness	Emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development
3	Rahman & Mulyani (2021)	Social competence and classroom climate	Teachers' interpersonal communication improves students' learning motivation	Relevant to the social competence aspect in SNP
4	Saito et al. (2022)	Education reform in Southeast Asia	Teacher competence serves as the foundation for sustainable education reform	Reinforces the relevance of SNP in a global context
5	Kurniawati & Setiawan (2023)	Implementation of SNP in primary schools	SNP improves learning quality consistency and teacher accountability	Shows a direct relationship between SNP and the quality of primary school learning
6	Darling-Hammond et al. (2023)	Teaching quality and learning outcomes	Professional and pedagogical competence enhance educational equity	Strengthens the professional and pedagogical dimensions of teachers
7	Collie, Shapka & Perry (2021)	Teachers' socio-emotional competence	Teacher well-being and a positive classroom climate are improved	Strengthens teachers' social and personality aspects
8	Tran & Nguyen (2023)	Digital pedagogical literacy and professional reflection	Teachers can adapt learning to students' individual needs	Relevant to professional and pedagogical competence
9	Rahmawati (2024)	Challenges in implementing SNP in underdeveloped (3T) regions	Teachers have not yet been able to fully integrate the four competencies	Identifies the need for strengthening teacher training
10	Sujana & Ratnawati (2022)	Teachers' personality competence	Teachers' integrity and empathy enhance students' motivation and discipline	Reinforces the personality pillar of teacher competence
11	Lestari & Firmansyah (2023)	Social competence and classroom climate	Teachers with effective communication create an inclusive classroom climate	Strengthens teachers' social aspect
12	Knezović et al. (2025)	Teachers' self-management and social awareness	Teachers' socio-emotional competence reduces burnout risk	Strengthens the integration of social and personality aspects within SNP
13	Hargreaves & Fullan (2020)	Teacher professional transformation	Teachers as lifelong learners promote innovation in teaching	Strengthens teachers' professional competence
14	OECD (2021)	21st-century learning	Teachers must be adaptive, collaborative, and creative	Relevant for integrating pedagogical, social, and professional competences
15	Vygotsky (1978)	Social constructivist theory	Meaningful learning occurs when teachers act as facilitators within	Provides the theoretical foundation for teachers' pedagogical competence

students' ZPD (Zone of
Proximal Development)

Synergy of the Four Teacher Competencies in Realizing Quality Learning

The synthesis results reveal that the four teacher competencies do not stand alone but are interconnected, forming an integrated system. Pedagogical competence ensures the effectiveness of learning, personal competence fosters integrity, social competence builds educational relationships, and professional competence guarantees expertise and the relevance of knowledge.

When these four competencies function synergistically, they create a holistic learning model that balances the development of students' character, knowledge, and skills. Conversely, the weakness of one aspect can disrupt the overall stability of the learning process.

International findings from the OECD (2020) and Darling-Hammond (2023) reinforce the view that the integration of teacher competencies is the key to 21st-century educational reform. In the national context, the implementation of the National Education Standards (SNP) provides a strategic direction for strengthening an equitable, accountable, and globally competitive basic education system.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the literature review and theoretical analysis, it can be concluded that teacher competence based on the National Education Standards (SNP) is a fundamental pillar in realizing quality learning in elementary schools, as the four competencies—pedagogical, personal, social, and professional—work synergistically to create a student-centered, character-based, and 21st-century–relevant education system that balances cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. Pedagogical competence ensures effective, contextual, and participatory learning that promotes higher-order thinking skills; personal competence functions as a moral foundation and role model that fosters a positive psychological climate and strengthens student character in line with the Pancasila Student Profile; social competence enhances collaboration and communication among teachers, students, parents, and the wider community; and professional competence guarantees mastery of subject matter, reflective practice, and innovative teaching through the integration of digital technology and differentiated instruction. Therefore, the implementation of the SNP should be viewed not merely as an administrative requirement but as a national strategy to improve the quality of basic education and to develop a character-driven, adaptive, and globally competitive generation. In line with these conclusions, strengthening teacher competence requires concrete policy actions at the school, district, and national levels, including continuous professional development to update pedagogical and digital skills, reinforced competency-based evaluation systems to align classroom practice with SNP standards, and curriculum reform that supports competency-oriented learning focused on critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and character development, thereby ensuring sustainable improvement in learning outcomes in elementary schools.

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