

The Role of the *Bunga Lestari* Teacher Activity Center Learning Community in Improving the Competency of Early Childhood Education Educators in Bungah District, Gresik Regency

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to examine the role of the *Bunga Lestari* Teacher Activity Center (PKG) Learning Community in enhancing the competency of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) educators in Bungah District, Gresik Regency. It focuses on how the learning community contributes to pedagogic, personal, social, and professional competencies of PAUD educators amidst the implementation of the independent curriculum. **Method:** A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, collecting data through observation, interviews, and documentation among members of the PKG *Bunga Lestari* community consisting of educators from preschool institutions in Bungah. The study analyzed the forms of competency improvements, the community's role as a learning platform, and factors supporting or inhibiting its effectiveness. **Results:** Findings show that the PKG *Bunga Lestari* Learning Community effectively facilitates professional development by enabling peer discussion, sharing of best practices, and overcoming challenges related to the independent curriculum. Educators reported improved pedagogical skills and increased confidence in curriculum implementation. The community also helped disseminate government policies related to early childhood education. **Novelty:** This research contributes novel empirical evidence on the practical impacts of a structured learning community within a rural Indonesian context. It highlights the PKG *Bunga Lestari* community as a sustainable, collaborative model of strengthens educational policy advocacy and local networking, offering valuable insights for similar educational settings.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) plays a crucial role in fostering children's holistic development, including cognitive, emotional, social, and physical growth (Ghosh & Steinberg, 2022). Early childhood education is important. (Luthfiyah & Yusuf, 2025). According to (Ranta et al., 2023), to better understand the impact of pedagogical practices in Finnish ECE on children's development and discern the elements of high-quality pedagogy and adept teaching, it is important to grasp the concept of pedagogy and the essential competencies associated with it. Early childhood is crucial for governments' efforts to improve the quality of life for their populations. (Javier et al., 2025). Globally and in Indonesia, there is growing consensus on the importance of investing in quality early education programs, especially for disadvantaged populations, to ensure long-term educational and economic outcomes (Kim, 2022). In Indonesia, early childhood education is provided through formal, non-formal, and informal channels, supported by national legislation emphasizing every child's right to quality education (Law No. 20 of 2003 and Law No. 23 of 2002). Types of non-formal education include life skills education, early childhood education, youth education, women's empowerment education, literacy education, skills education/courses, and job training (Karim, 2017) in (Ratnawaty Chotim, 2021). One of them is early childhood education, which is essential. International

evidence contributes to building a consensus on investing in children's early years by showing.

Teachers are pivotal in the delivery and success of ECE, requiring a high level of competence across pedagogic, professional, personality, and social domains. This statement is supported by other studies, indicating that effective teaching requires teachers who possess high qualifications, competencies, and dedication (Rahmawati et al., 2024). Teacher competencies encompass pedagogic, personality, social, and professional domains, as mandated by Indonesian law (UU No.14/2005) (Nurhayati & Handayani, 2020). Capacity building may play an important role in improving classroom teachers' and early childhood educators' (ECE) capacity to implement physical activity and FMS interventions (Bourke et al., 2024). Research suggests that preschool readiness may help children lay the foundation for later school achievements and lifelong success (Shen et al., 2025). The recent implementation of the Independent (Merdeka) Curriculum emphasizes learner-centered approaches and autonomy, demanding continuous professional development for educators to adapt effectively (Triningsih et al., 2025). The basis for improving the professional competence of Early Childhood Educators through in-house training is in the form and process of application, which includes identifying participant needs, developing ideas or concepts for implementation techniques, designing, implementing, and evaluating training sessions using both face-to-face and online training techniques (Rohaeni & Nurhayati, 2025). The findings underscore the need for reflection on the specific professional competencies required for early childhood educators, which is crucial for enhancing both initial and ongoing teacher training programs (Pinya-medina et al., 2024). The competencies that early childhood teachers must have include four competencies, namely pedagogic competence, social competence, professional competence and personality competence (Andriansyah & Ismiatun, 2021).

Pedagogic competence, in particular, involves curriculum development, technology integration, lesson planning, and the evaluation of student learning outcomes. Teachers' pedagogical competence is one of the main factors influencing the quality of learning and student achievement (Sa et al., 2025). The competence of educators is crucial in determining how to produce quality education and prepare graduate students who are useful in nation-building (Lestari et al., 2022). According to Kontovourki et al. (2018) in (Spernes et al., 2025), teachers' professionalism is shaped by their past and current school experiences. However, the quality of pedagogic skills varies across regions and institutions, pointing to continuing needs for professional development to meet evolving educational demands (Khusna & Priyanti, 2023). Educational technology usage and curriculum innovations further underscore the necessity for sustained teacher capacity-building. According to Nguyen and Chung (2020) in (Connor et al., 2023) explain smart education is a 'comprehensive integration of technology, accessibility and connecting everything via the internet, anytime and anywhere'. With this perspective of education dominating teaching practices across the globe, in Vietnam, educators required significant changes to their traditional practices to remain in line with education progression amongst their competitors. Teachers' involvement in the learning

community can improve teaching practices, motivation, and a sense of belonging to their profession (Arifin et al., 2025).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have emerged internationally as an effective framework for teachers' professional growth by fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and reflective practice (Sekar & Kamarubiani, 2023). Building professional learning communities (PLC) has become a widely recognized strategy for school development and for student achievement (Antinluoma et al., 2021). Understanding how PLCs are fostered and developed in diverse settings, including China, can offer valuable insights for global educational reform efforts (Gu & Liu, 2025). As for in case Ghana, the leads played a role in new Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, for which schools were to close early on Wednesday afternoons. PLCs were intended as communities of practice for teachers to lead and discuss issues of teaching and learning, based on nationally-determined and school-selected topics aligned to the NTS (Bell, 2025). Research by Bolam et al. (2005) in (Hudson, 2024) reported that effective PLCs generally displayed eight characteristics: (a) shared values and vision about pupil learning and leadership; (b) collective responsibility for pupil learning; (c) collaboration focused on learning; (d) individual and collective professional learning; (e) reflective professional enquiry; (f) openness, networks, and partnerships; (g) inclusive membership; and (h) mutual trust, respect, and support. According to (Ren et al., 2025) in urban areas in China, where schools have better resources, PLCs are more systematically implemented, with dedicated funding and support from the government or schools and these PLCs often conduct regular activities, offering teachers the chance to reflect on and improve their practices. In Thailand, in-service teachers' professional development has been implemented through the Professional Learning Community (PLC) program for more than four years to develop teachers' sustainably (Meesuk & Wongrugsu, 2021). Empowerment for teachers is particularly crucial in competency evaluation, and performance appraisal training is essential for them, as they play a significant role in developing educational management to achieve higher efficiency and quality (Hansena et al., 2020). Teacher professional development in Malaysia has long been a fundamental component in efforts to improve the quality of national education (Banowati, 2025). Internal and external factors can influence the decision to choose teaching as a profession. When internal factors are the determinants, it indicates that individuals possess the necessary professional and personality traits.

Furthermore, professional commitment is also widespread among those who choose the teaching profession for the sake of society (Ayranci & Bağcı, 2021). Teachers' professional identities, or the professional images teachers have of themselves, play an essential role in teachers' pedagogical knowledge and their propensity to stay in the profession (Huang et al., 2022). However, much of the existing literature focuses on urban or well-resourced contexts, leaving a gap in understanding the role of PLCs in rural settings such as Bungah District in Gresik Regency, Indonesia.

This study addresses this gap by exploring the role of the Bunga Lestari Teacher Activity Center (PKG) Learning Community in enhancing the competencies of rural PAUD educators. Amidst initial resistance and challenges related to new curriculum

demands, this community provides vital peer support and resource access, helping educators develop pedagogic skills and professional confidence.

The objective is thus clearly linked to the identified gap: to investigate how this rural learning community contributes to professional competency development for PAUD educators in Bungah District. This study contributes to broader discussions on rural teacher professionalization and decentralized education reforms in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at gaining an in-depth and holistic understanding of the phenomena experienced by early childhood educators involved in the Bunga Lestari Teacher Activity Center (PKG) Learning Community in Bungah District. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate because it allows exploration of both explicit and tacit knowledge related to teacher competencies and professional development within a naturalistic context. Qualitative research is an approach to obtain in-depth data, data that contains meaning, definite data that is a value behind the data that appears (Sugiono, 2016). Qualitative research is research that uses a natural setting, with the intention of interpreting something that happens and is carried out by involving various existing methods and in-depth (Moleong, 2016). Qualitative case study research forces researchers to conduct detailed data mining and to analyze the interactions between factors involved in a study intensively (Riyanto & Trenda, 2016). This method aligns with the research questions which seek to describe and explain educators' experiences, perceptions, and the role of the learning community in enhancing their competencies. The study involved nine PAUD educators and one supervisor, purposively selected from three institutions actively participating in the PKG Bunga Lestari learning community.

Participants were chosen based on their active involvement (minimum one year) in learning community activities and their roles in implementing the Independent Curriculum: 1.) The educators' ages ranged between 24 to 58 years; 2.) They possessed varied academic backgrounds, notably diplomas or bachelor's degrees in early childhood education; 3.) Their professional teaching experience spanned from 3 up to 20 years, ensuring they brought diverse perspectives regarding competency development over time. This detailed participant profile enriches the contextual understanding of findings and supports the credibility and transferability of the study.

Data were collected over a three-month period (February to April 2025), combining longitudinal and cross-sectional elements. Participant observations spanned various learning community sessions, workshops, and in-situ collaborative activities throughout this timeframe, enabling the researcher to capture evolving practices and deeper insights. In-depth interviews were conducted at multiple points within this period, allowing iterative probing and reflection with participants. A semi-structured interview guide provided flexibility to explore emerging themes while ensuring consistency across interviewees (Riyanto & Trenda, 2016). Documentation, including meeting minutes, training materials, and digital communications, was gathered concurrently to triangulate and corroborate verbal and observational data. These documents were reviewed to

triangulate and support the validity of findings obtained from observations and interviews (Yanti et al., 2025).

To ensure data trustworthiness, the study incorporated the following strategies: 1.) Triangulation: Multiple data sources (observation, interviews, documentation) were systematically analyzed to cross-validate findings. Data convergence helped identify consistent patterns related to community roles and competency improvements; 2.) Member Checking: Preliminary interpretations and thematic summaries were shared with participants in follow-up sessions to confirm accuracy and invite feedback. At least two rounds of member checking were conducted, during which participant suggestions led to refined clarifications and emergent insights; 3.) Audit Trail: Comprehensive records of data collection procedures, raw data, coding schemes, and analytic decisions were maintained, allowing for transparent scrutiny and replication by other researchers; 4.) Reflexivity: The researcher engaged in ongoing reflection on personal biases and the research context to minimize subjectivity, documented through memos and reflective journals throughout the data collection and analysis stages. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent and ensuring participant anonymity through pseudonyms. The research protocol received institutional review board approval, guaranteeing adherence to ethical research standards.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Role of the PKG Bunga Lestari Learning Community in Enhancing PAUD Educators' Competency

The PKG Bunga Lestari Learning Community serves 78 PAUD educational units in Bungah District, established to support educators in transitioning from the 2013 Curriculum to the Independent Curriculum. Before its formation, educators experienced uncertainty, lacked peer discussion avenues, and had difficulty accessing curriculum implementation resources.

Self-Development Through Collaborative Relationships

Educators stressed the importance of collaboration in generating innovative teaching strategies and mutual problem-solving. For instance, Robi'atul Adawiyah reported that: *"Engaging regularly with peers in discussions and reflections to address teaching issues collectively."*

Similarly, Siti Maisaroh highlighted how sharing experiences and pooling resources fostered professional growth.

"Such collaborative ties effectively enhance pedagogic and emotional competencies (WM/PD/SM/10-03-2025)."

Acquisition of New Knowledge

Interviewees reported gaining practical expertise in positive discipline, identification of children with special needs, leveraging educational technology, and applying differentiated instruction and assessments. As one educator noted by Imro'atus is:

“New competencies empowered them to confidently implement the Independent Curriculum (WM/PD/IM/21-03-2025).”

Skill Development

Participation in teaching teams, workshops, webinars, and knowledge shares contributed to skill enhancement. Imro'atus described advancing her facilitation capabilities through active community roles (WM/PD/IM/21-03-2025). Leadership roles within the community further deepened members' professional skills.

Learning Community as an Effective Platform

Despite infrastructure constraints—including borrowed meeting spaces and limited internet access—member motivation remained high. Experienced facilitators and mentors from education authorities elevated community effectiveness. A mix of online webinars and offline workshops addressed diverse learning preferences and competency needs.

Supporting Local Government Policy Dissemination

The community played a crucial role in localizing policy knowledge, thus aiding the implementation of reforms like the Independent Curriculum and Merdeka Mengajar platform, through collaboration with district supervisors and education offices.

Discussion

The results affirm the critical influence of the PKG Bunga Lestari Learning Community in fostering continuous professional development among PAUD educators. This is particularly significant given that the socio-cultural environment plays the biggest role in children's cognitive content and way of thinking, as theorized by Vygotsky (Jean, 2024). The emphasis on peer interaction and knowledge sharing cultivates a communal learning process that enriches both pedagogic and socio-emotional skills necessary for effective early childhood education.

These findings reinforce Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which posits learning and cognitive development as inherently social and collaboratively constructed processes. The early childhood development (ECD) phase, spanning the initial eight years of life, assumes paramount importance as it establishes the groundwork for enduring physical, cognitive, social, and emotional well-being (Khanam et al., 2025). The PKG Bunga Lestari Learning Community exemplifies scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where educators receive and offer support to progressively master new pedagogical demands collectively. The community's emphasis on peer interaction, reflective dialogue, and knowledge exchange aligns with established research on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), proven to enhance teacher competence and motivation via shared expertise and continuous improvement cycles. The practical acquisition of skills ranging from classroom management to inclusive education techniques enhances educators' capacity to meet diverse learner needs, consistent with (Sekar & Kamarubiani, 2023) framework on skill development within learning communities. In urban China, PLCs benefit from formalized structures and funding

facilitating periodic development activities (Ren et al., 2025). PLCs are highly influential in promoting informal teacher leadership, which in turn has a high positive linkage to teachers' focus on improving student learning (Lee & Ip, 2021). Teachers' experiences within a PLC were examined for patterns of cultivated leadership (Wilson, 2016). An extensive and international evidence base positions professional learning communities (PLCs) as an effective continued professional development (CPD) mechanism that can impact on teachers' practices and, in turn, students' learning (Goodyear et al., 2019). PKG Bunga Lestari contributes uniquely by illustrating these dynamics in a rural Indonesian context faced with distinct resource challenges.

The critical infrastructural limitations, including a lack of dedicated space and reliable internet, pose significant risks to the long-term sustainability and wider scalability of rural learning communities. Similar issues recognized in Indonesian rural education caution that without investment in physical and technological resources, such communities may struggle to maintain engagement and capitalize on digital learning opportunities (Khusna & Priyanti, 2023). Such constraints affect the frequency and quality of virtual professional development sessions, essential in current education contexts. Thus, policymakers and district authorities must prioritize infrastructural support to amplify these communities' impacts and equitable access.

Nevertheless, the community's resilience, adaptive strategies, and strong social capital underscore the power of collaborative learning even with limited material resources. This points to the need for context-sensitive approaches balancing social and infrastructural enablers. In sum, this study corroborates broader theoretical insights into socially mediated teacher learning while offering novel empirical evidence on rural Indonesian learning communities, enriching global understandings of professional development amid resource variability.

CONCLUSION

Fundamentals finding: This study fundamentally reveals that the PKG Bunga Lestari Learning Community plays a pivotal role in enhancing the pedagogic, personal, social, and professional competencies of Early Childhood Education (PAUD) educators in Bungah District. By fostering continuous professional development through collaborative knowledge sharing, reflective practice, and peer learning, the community effectively supports educators in successfully implementing the Independent Curriculum. Despite facing infrastructural constraints such as limited dedicated learning spaces and inconsistent internet access, the community's active engagement, skilled facilitation, and diverse learning activities sustain its positive impact. **Implications:** The findings underscore the critical need for policymakers to institutionalize and formally support PKG communities like Bunga Lestari within regional education systems. Specific recommendations include allocating dedicated budgets to improve infrastructure—especially digital connectivity and physical collaboration spaces—to enhance community sustainability and scalability. Moreover, embedding such learning communities into official teacher professional development programs can accelerate curriculum reform adoption and improve education quality, particularly in rural contexts where resources are limited. **Limitations:** While this qualitative study offers rich contextual insights,

limitations must be acknowledged. The focus on a single community within one district limits the generalizability of findings to other regions. Additionally, as with many qualitative studies, there is potential for researcher bias and subjectivity in participant responses, which may influence interpretations despite efforts to ensure credibility through triangulation and member checking. Future studies should consider these factors in their design and analysis. **Future Research:** To deepen understanding of learning communities' impact, future research should employ mixed methods designs that quantitatively assess student outcomes alongside qualitative teacher experiences. Longitudinal studies are particularly encouraged to evaluate the sustained effects of professional learning communities on teacher competency development and student achievement over time. Additionally, action research involving iterative community development and policy engagement could provide practical models for enhancing learning community efficacy and institutional integration.

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