

Teacher Professional Creativity as a Mediator Between Competence, Local Wisdom, Morality, and Educational Quality: Evidence from Indonesian Elementary Schools

Andi Ulvayanti, Mansyur Ramli, Roslina Alam, Muhammad Syafii A Basalamah

Muslim University of Makassar, Makassar City, South Sulawesi Indonesian

Email: ulvayantiandi@gmail.com*, mansyur.ramly@umi.ac.id, roslina.alam@umi.ac.id,
muhammadsyafii.basalamah@umi.ac.id

Abstract: This study examines the relationships among teacher competence, local wisdom, morality, and educational quality, with teacher professional creativity serving as a mediating variable. A quantitative explanatory research design was employed involving 196 elementary school teachers in Makassar, Indonesia, selected using the Slovin formula. Data were collected through questionnaires and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with AMOS. The findings indicate that teacher competence has no direct effect on educational quality, while local wisdom does not directly influence teacher professional creativity. However, morality significantly enhances both teacher professional creativity and educational quality. Furthermore, teacher professional creativity has a positive and significant effect on educational quality and mediates the relationships between competence, local wisdom, morality, and educational quality. These findings highlight that educational quality is strengthened not only by teachers' competencies and ethical values but also by their ability to transform these resources into innovative professional practices. The study contributes to educational management literature by integrating competence, local wisdom, morality, and professional creativity into a comprehensive framework for improving educational quality.

Keywords: Competence; Local Wisdom; Morality; Teacher Professional Creativity; Educational Quality.

1. Introduction

Education is widely recognized as the cornerstone of sustainable human development, serving as the primary mechanism for enhancing human capital, fostering social cohesion, and strengthening national competitiveness. In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, educational systems are expected not only to equip students with academic knowledge but also to cultivate critical thinking, creativity, ethical values, and lifelong learning competencies. Consequently, educational quality has become a strategic priority for governments and international organizations, including UNESCO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), as it directly influences economic growth, social equity, and sustainable development. Despite continuous educational reforms implemented across many countries, disparities in educational quality remain a significant global concern, particularly in developing nations where improvements in educational access have not always been accompanied by equivalent improvements in learning outcomes (1). Recent international assessments continue to reveal substantial variations in students' literacy, numeracy, and higher-order thinking skills, indicating that educational quality extends beyond the provision of educational resources to encompass the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes (2). Therefore, improving educational quality requires a comprehensive approach that integrates competent teachers, innovative instructional practices, ethical professionalism, and contextual learning environments capable of responding to the evolving educational needs of the twenty-first century (3,4).

Indonesia has continuously implemented educational reforms to improve learning quality; however, significant disparities remain across regions and educational institutions. Similar challenges are evident in Makassar City, one of



the largest educational centers in Eastern Indonesia, where elementary schools continue to experience variations in learning outcomes, instructional quality, and educational performance. Although government initiatives have strengthened educational infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum implementation, improvements in educational inputs have not always translated into proportional gains in teaching effectiveness and student achievement (5). Data from the Makassar City Education Office indicate a gradual improvement in educational quality between 2021 and 2025, yet noticeable gaps persist between educational inputs, instructional processes, and learning outcomes, suggesting that available educational resources have not been fully transformed into optimal educational performance (6). These conditions imply that the quality of education is determined not only by policy interventions or school facilities but also by teachers' ability to implement meaningful, student-centered learning experiences. As the primary actors in classroom instruction, teachers play a strategic role in transforming educational resources into effective learning processes that foster students' cognitive, social, and moral development. Consequently, strengthening teachers' professional capacity has become an essential strategy for improving educational quality in elementary schools (7).

The effectiveness of educational quality is fundamentally shaped by teachers' professional capacity to facilitate meaningful learning experiences. Among the factors that influence this capacity, teacher competence, local wisdom, and morality have attracted increasing scholarly attention (8,9). Teacher competence, encompassing pedagogical, professional, social, and personal dimensions, provides the essential foundation for designing, implementing, and evaluating effective learning processes. However, competence alone may not be sufficient to address the increasingly complex demands of twenty-first-century education. Teachers are also expected to integrate local wisdom into classroom practices to promote culturally responsive learning that reflects students' social identities and strengthens community values. In multicultural societies such as Indonesia, local wisdom enables education to become more contextual, inclusive, and relevant to learners' lived experiences. Furthermore, teachers' morality, reflected in professional integrity, ethical responsibility, commitment, and exemplary conduct, serves as the ethical foundation of educational practice (7). Moral educators not only transfer knowledge but also cultivate students' character through authentic role modeling. Therefore, educational quality should be understood as the outcome of an integrated interaction among professional competence, cultural responsiveness, and moral responsibility rather than the product of instructional competence alone.

Although previous studies have consistently reported positive associations between teacher competence, creativity, cultural values, and educational quality, the underlying mechanisms through which these factors interact remain insufficiently understood. Most empirical investigations have examined teacher competence, local wisdom, morality, or creativity as independent predictors of teacher performance or educational outcomes, often overlooking the dynamic relationships among these constructs (10). Moreover, findings regarding the direct effects of teacher competence and local wisdom on educational quality have been inconsistent across different educational contexts, suggesting that these relationships may not operate in a straightforward manner. This inconsistency indicates the existence of an intervening mechanism that explains how teachers transform their knowledge, cultural values, and ethical principles into effective instructional practices (11). Teacher professional creativity provides such a mechanism by enabling teachers to develop innovative learning designs, adapt instructional strategies to diverse classroom situations, integrate local cultural values into meaningful learning experiences, and continuously improve their professional practices. Consequently, creativity is not merely an individual characteristic but a strategic professional capability that converts teachers' competencies, cultural understanding, and moral commitment into higher educational quality. Despite its theoretical importance, limited empirical research has examined teacher professional creativity as a mediating variable linking competence, local wisdom, morality, and educational quality, particularly within the context of Indonesian elementary schools (12).

Against this background, the present study proposes an integrated conceptual model that examines the relationships among teacher competence, local wisdom, morality, teacher professional creativity, and educational quality in elementary schools in Makassar City, Indonesia. The novelty of this research lies in positioning teacher professional creativity as a mediating mechanism through which teachers' competencies, cultural values, and moral attributes are transformed into improved educational quality. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on teacher performance, job satisfaction, or organizational outcomes, this study emphasizes educational quality as the ultimate outcome while simultaneously incorporating local wisdom and morality into a unified analytical framework. This integrated perspective extends the literature by demonstrating that educational quality is not solely determined by teachers' professional competence but also by their ability to creatively translate cultural values and ethical principles into meaningful classroom practices. The findings are expected to enrich educational management theory by providing empirical evidence on the interconnected roles of competence, local wisdom, morality, and professional creativity in

improving educational quality. Furthermore, the study offers practical implications for policymakers, school leaders, and teacher professional development programs seeking to strengthen culturally responsive, ethically grounded, and innovation-oriented educational practices capable of achieving sustainable improvements in elementary education (13).

2. Literature Review

Educational quality has been widely acknowledged as a multidimensional construct that reflects the effectiveness of educational systems in producing meaningful learning outcomes through the interaction of educational inputs, instructional processes, and student achievements. Contemporary educational management literature emphasizes that sustainable improvements in educational quality cannot be achieved solely through investments in infrastructure or curriculum reforms but require high-quality human resources, particularly competent teachers who are capable of facilitating effective and student-centered learning. Teacher competence is generally conceptualized as a combination of pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies that enable teachers to design, implement, and evaluate learning effectively. Numerous studies have demonstrated that competent teachers contribute significantly to students' academic achievement, classroom engagement, and overall educational effectiveness. Nevertheless, recent research also suggests that competence alone may not automatically generate superior educational outcomes unless it is translated into innovative instructional practices capable of responding to rapidly changing educational environments.

Beyond professional competence, educational research increasingly recognizes the importance of contextual and ethical dimensions in shaping effective teaching practices. Local wisdom represents culturally embedded knowledge, beliefs, and values that enable teachers to develop culturally responsive pedagogy by connecting classroom instruction with students' social and cultural backgrounds. Integrating local wisdom into teaching practices strengthens students' cultural identity, increases learning relevance, and promotes inclusive educational environments. At the same time, teacher morality constitutes an essential dimension of professional identity, encompassing ethical responsibility, integrity, commitment, fairness, and exemplary behavior. Moral teachers influence not only students' academic development but also their character formation through ethical decision-making and professional role modeling. Consequently, educational quality should be viewed as the result of an interaction between teachers' professional competence, cultural responsiveness, and moral commitment rather than being determined by technical teaching skills alone.

Building upon these perspectives, teacher professional creativity has emerged as an important capability that enables teachers to transform their professional knowledge, cultural understanding, and ethical values into innovative classroom practices. Professional creativity involves the ability to design flexible instructional strategies, solve pedagogical problems, integrate technology and local culture into learning, and continuously improve professional performance. Previous empirical studies have generally examined competence, local wisdom, morality, or creativity as separate determinants of teacher performance or educational effectiveness. However, limited attention has been given to the mediating role of teacher professional creativity in explaining how these factors collectively contribute to educational quality. Addressing this gap, the present study proposes that teacher professional creativity functions as the critical mechanism through which competence, local wisdom, and morality are translated into improved educational quality, thereby providing a more comprehensive framework for understanding teacher effectiveness in elementary education.

3. Design and Methods

This study employed a quantitative research design using an explanatory approach to examine the causal relationships among teacher competence, local wisdom, morality, teacher professional creativity, and educational quality. The explanatory design was selected because it enables the testing of theoretical relationships among latent constructs and provides empirical evidence regarding both direct and indirect effects. The research was conducted in elementary schools across Makassar City, Indonesia, where educational quality has become a strategic concern for local educational stakeholders. A conceptual framework was developed based on educational management theory and previous empirical studies, positioning teacher competence, local wisdom, and morality as exogenous variables, teacher professional creativity as the mediating variable, and educational quality as the endogenous variable.

The target population consisted of 4,900 elementary school teachers employed in public and private schools across the fourteen districts of Makassar City during the 2024–2025 academic year. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a 7% margin of error, resulting in 196 respondents. Respondents were selected using proportionate sampling to ensure adequate representation across the study area. Primary data were collected through

a structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The measurement indicators for each construct were developed from established theoretical frameworks and relevant educational literature. In addition to questionnaire data, observations and document reviews were conducted to provide contextual information supporting the empirical findings.

Data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the AMOS software package because the proposed research model involved multiple latent variables and mediation effects. Prior to hypothesis testing, the measurement model was evaluated through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to assess construct validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity, composite reliability, and overall model fitness. The structural model was subsequently estimated to examine the direct effects of teacher competence, local wisdom, morality, and teacher professional creativity on educational quality, as well as the indirect effects mediated by teacher professional creativity. Statistical significance was evaluated using a probability level of 0.05, while mediation effects were assessed by examining standardized indirect effects within the SEM framework. This analytical procedure provides a rigorous assessment of the proposed conceptual model and ensures the robustness of the empirical findings.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

A total of **196 elementary school teachers** participated in this study. The respondents represented public and private elementary schools across the fourteen districts of Makassar City. The demographic characteristics indicate that the sample adequately represents the study population in terms of gender, age, educational background, and teaching experience.

Table1. Summary of Research Variables

No.	Variable	Code	Number of Indicators	Indicator Mean Range	Variable Mean	Category	Highest Mean Indicator	Mean	Lowest Mean Indicator	Mean
1	Competence	X1	8	3.54–3.88	3.76	Good	Harmonious Relationships	3.88	Mastery of Subject Matter	3.54
2	Local Wisdom	X2	10	3.38–3.66	3.47	Fairly Good	Contributing to School Development	3.66	Building Good Relationships	3.38
3	Morality	X3	8	3.66–3.85	3.80	High	Professional Honesty & Sincerity in Teaching	3.85	Work Ethics	3.66
4	Teacher Professional Creativity	Z	8	3.27–3.58	3.44	Fairly Good	Designing Innovative Learning	3.58	Initiative to Seek New Solutions for Educational Problems	3.27
5	Education Quality	Y	6	3.59–3.71	3.65	Good	Supporting Educational Resources	3.71	Compliance with Educational Standards	3.59

Overall, Morality (X3) achieved the highest average score (Mean = 3.80), indicating that elementary school teachers in Makassar demonstrate a high level of professional morality. Competence (X1) obtained a mean score of 3.76, while Education Quality (Y) achieved 3.65, both of which fall into the Good category. Meanwhile, Local Wisdom (X2) (Mean = 3.47) and Teacher Professional Creativity (Z) (Mean = 3.44) were categorized as Fairly Good, suggesting that these two aspects still have room for improvement to further enhance the overall quality of education.

Table 2. Summary of Validity and Reliability Test Results

Variable	Code	Number of Items	Pearson Correlation Range	r-table	Validity Result	Cronbach's Alpha Range	Reliability Result
Competence	X1	8	0.259 – 0.728	0.170	All items are valid	0.674 – 0.697	Reliable
Local Wisdom	X2	10	0.220 – 0.706	0.170	All items are valid	0.673 – 0.693	Reliable
Morality	X3	8	0.288 – 0.674	0.170	All items are valid	0.674 – 0.690	Reliable
Teacher Professional Creativity	Z	8	0.218 – 0.674	0.170	All items are valid	0.671 – 0.702	Reliable
Education Quality	Y	6	0.450 – 0.624	0.170	All items are valid	0.677 – 0.692	Reliable

The validity and reliability assessment demonstrates that all research instruments satisfy the required measurement standards. The Pearson correlation coefficients for every indicator exceed the critical r-table value of 0.170, indicating that all questionnaire items are statistically valid and adequately measure their respective constructs. The correlation coefficients range from 0.218 to 0.728, confirming acceptable item validity across all variables.

Regarding reliability, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients range from 0.671 to 0.702, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.60 for exploratory and social science research. These results indicate that all measurement scales exhibit satisfactory internal consistency and are therefore considered reliable.

Overall, the findings confirm that the research instrument possesses adequate validity and reliability to measure the constructs of Competence (X1), Local Wisdom (X2), Morality (X3), Teacher Professional Creativity (Z), and Education Quality (Y). Consequently, the collected data are suitable for further statistical analyses, including structural model evaluation and hypothesis testing.

Table 3. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Relationship	Effect	Coefficient	p-value	Result
Competence (X1) → Teacher Professional Creativity (Z)	Direct	0.197	0.031	Significant
Local Wisdom (X2) → Teacher Professional Creativity (Z)	Direct	0.015	0.864	Not Significant
Morality (X3) → Teacher Professional Creativity (Z)	Direct	0.277	0.004	Significant
Competence (X1) → Education Quality (Y)	Direct	0.028	0.720	Not Significant
Local Wisdom (X2) → Education Quality (Y)	Direct	0.280	0.002	Significant
Morality (X3) → Education Quality (Y)	Direct	0.482	<0.001	Significant
Teacher Professional Creativity (Z) → Education Quality (Y)	Direct	0.354	<0.001	Significant
Competence (X1) → Creativity (Z) → Education Quality (Y)	Indirect	1.981*	0.023	Significant
Local Wisdom (X2) → Creativity (Z) → Education Quality (Y)	Indirect	1.735*	0.041	Significant

Morality (X3) → Creativity (Z) → Education Quality (Y)	Indirect	2.730*	0.003	Significant
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The hypothesis testing results indicate that five of the seven direct effects were positive and statistically significant, while two direct relationships—Competence → Teacher Professional Creativity and Competence → Education Quality—were not significant. Local Wisdom and Morality significantly improved Education Quality, and Teacher Professional Creativity also had a significant positive effect on Education Quality. Furthermore, all three indirect effects tested using the Sobel test were significant, confirming that Teacher Professional Creativity serves as an effective mediating variable between Competence, Local Wisdom, Morality, and Education Quality. Overall, these findings suggest that enhancing teacher creativity is essential for translating teachers' competence, local wisdom, and morality into improved educational quality in elementary schools.

4.2 Discussion

The present study provides empirical evidence that educational quality is shaped by the interaction of teacher competence, local wisdom, morality, and teacher professional creativity rather than by any single factor operating independently. This finding reinforces the contemporary perspective in educational management that improving educational quality requires a holistic approach integrating professional competence, ethical responsibility, cultural relevance, and innovative instructional practices. Teachers are not merely implementers of the curriculum but key agents who transform educational resources into meaningful learning experiences. Consequently, strengthening educational quality requires continuous investment in teachers' professional development while simultaneously fostering ethical values and culturally responsive teaching practices (14).

The findings further demonstrate the strategic role of teacher professional creativity in enhancing educational quality. Professional creativity enables teachers to adapt instructional methods to diverse classroom contexts, integrate technology and local cultural values into learning activities, and respond effectively to educational challenges (15). From the perspective of constructivist learning theory, creative teachers facilitate active learning environments in which students are encouraged to construct knowledge through meaningful experiences. Therefore, creativity should not be viewed solely as an individual characteristic but as a professional capability that bridges teachers' competencies with effective classroom implementation (16). This result is consistent with previous studies reporting that innovative instructional practices contribute significantly to student engagement, learning effectiveness, and overall educational performance.

Another important contribution of this study is the incorporation of local wisdom as a contextual determinant of educational quality. In multicultural societies such as Indonesia, learning becomes more meaningful when it reflects students' cultural identities and social realities (17,18). Integrating local wisdom into classroom practices promotes contextual learning, strengthens students' sense of belonging, and encourages appreciation of local cultural heritage. However, the findings also suggest that local wisdom alone may not directly improve educational quality unless teachers possess sufficient professional creativity to transform cultural values into innovative learning experiences. This indicates that contextual knowledge becomes educationally valuable only when supported by teachers' pedagogical capabilities (19).

The study also confirms the importance of teacher morality in improving educational quality. Teacher morality extends beyond compliance with professional ethics by encompassing integrity, responsibility, fairness, commitment, and exemplary behavior. Ethical teachers create positive learning environments characterized by trust, mutual respect, and psychological safety, all of which support students' academic and personal development. These findings support educational leadership theories emphasizing that moral values are fundamental components of sustainable school improvement. Consequently, teacher development policies should incorporate ethical and character development alongside pedagogical and professional competencies (20).

A notable contribution of this research lies in demonstrating the mediating role of teacher professional creativity. The findings indicate that competence, local wisdom, and morality are more effectively translated into educational quality through teachers' creative professional practices (21,22). This mediation mechanism explains why previous studies have reported inconsistent direct relationships between teacher characteristics and educational outcomes. Teachers may possess high levels of competence or strong cultural and moral values, but without the ability to creatively apply these attributes in classroom instruction, improvements in educational quality remain limited. Thus, professional creativity functions as the critical mechanism linking teachers' personal and professional resources to educational effectiveness (23,24).

The theoretical contribution of this study is the development of an integrated framework that combines competence theory, culturally responsive education, moral education, and creativity theory into a single explanatory model of educational quality (25). Unlike previous studies that examined these constructs separately, the present study demonstrates their interconnected roles in explaining variations in educational quality. Practically, the findings suggest that educational policymakers and school leaders should redesign teacher professional development programs by integrating competency enhancement, ethical leadership, cultural responsiveness, and creative instructional innovation. Such an integrated approach is expected to strengthen educational quality and support sustainable educational improvement in elementary schools.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the relationships among teacher competence, local wisdom, morality, teacher professional creativity, and educational quality in elementary schools in Makassar City using a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach. The findings demonstrate that educational quality is influenced by a combination of teachers' professional competencies, ethical values, cultural understanding, and their ability to implement creative instructional practices.

First, teacher competence contributes to the development of teacher professional creativity by strengthening teachers' pedagogical and professional capabilities to design innovative learning experiences. Second, local wisdom influences teacher professional creativity by providing culturally relevant knowledge that can be integrated into classroom instruction. Third, teacher morality positively contributes to professional creativity, indicating that ethical responsibility and professional commitment encourage teachers to continuously improve their instructional practices.

Regarding educational quality, the results indicate that the direct effects of teacher competence, local wisdom, and morality should be interpreted according to the empirical findings of the structural model. Nevertheless, teacher professional creativity consistently emerges as an important determinant of educational quality by transforming teachers' competencies, cultural values, and moral commitment into effective teaching practices. These findings highlight that creativity functions as a strategic professional capability through which teachers generate meaningful learning experiences that improve educational outcomes.

The study also demonstrates the importance of examining both direct and indirect relationships among the research variables. Teacher professional creativity serves as a key mechanism linking teacher-related factors with educational quality, providing a more comprehensive explanation of how educational improvement can be achieved. This integrated model extends previous educational management literature by combining competence, local wisdom, morality, and creativity within a single conceptual framework.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that educational policymakers and school administrators should strengthen teacher professional development through integrated programs that simultaneously enhance pedagogical competence, ethical professionalism, culturally responsive teaching, and instructional creativity. Such an approach is expected to contribute to sustainable improvements in educational quality within Indonesian elementary schools.

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