

The Effect of Academic Qualifications and Teaching Experience on Pre-school Teacher Performance

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Abstract

The performance of educators at the Early Childhood Education (ECE) level plays a vital role in determining the quality of learning for children in their formative developmental stages. This study was conducted to examine the influence of formal educational background and professional teaching experience on the work performance of ECE teachers. Employing a quantitative method with an associative approach, the study involved 65 teachers as respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed through multiple linear regression with the assistance of SPSS version 27. The results revealed that the level of formal education did not significantly contribute to improving teacher performance, as indicated by a significance value exceeding the 0.05 threshold. In contrast, teaching experience showed a statistically significant relationship with teacher performance improvement, demonstrated by a significance value below 0.05 and a positive regression coefficient. This suggests that teaching experience exerts a stronger impact on shaping teacher competence and effectiveness than academic qualifications alone. Based on these findings, it is recommended that practice-based training programs be strengthened as part of the strategy to develop ECE teacher professionalism, particularly in the Periuk District, in order to support the sustainable improvement of early childhood education services.

Keywords: Teacher Performance; Academic Qualifications; Teaching Experience

History

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) plays a very important role in the formation of the foundation of a child's personality, character, and cognitive abilities (Nisviati, 2021). In this phase, children are in a golden period of growth that requires quality stimulation from various aspects, including professional and fun teaching. ECE teachers, as the main actors in early childhood development, are required to have high competence both in terms of academic qualifications and teaching experience (Ramdani, 2024). Thus, the quality of ECE teachers is one of the main indicators of the success of education programs directed at forming a generation of smart and character (Mubarak, Sari, Wibowo, 2025).

ECE teachers' academic qualifications refer to the level of formal education held by a teacher, which is regulated by government regulations to meet minimum standards of professional competence (Rais, 2019). Meanwhile, teaching experience represents the accumulation of direct practice in the learning process, which provides teachers with in-depth insights and skills to overcome challenges in the classroom (Sa'diyah et al., 2022). The combination of adequate academic qualifications and teaching

experience is expected to contribute significantly to the performance of ECE teachers in material delivery, classroom management, and understanding the specific needs of learners (Putri et al., 2023).

Observing the importance of academic qualifications and learning experience, but the fact that academic qualifications and teaching experience are normatively considered as the two main pillars in ensuring the quality of ECE teachers, in reality, there are still various discrepancies in their implementation in the field. Based on data from the Directorate General of Teachers and Education Personnel of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2023, out of a total of approximately 340,000 early childhood education teachers throughout Indonesia, only about 45% have a minimum academic qualification of D-IV or S1 as required by Law No. 14/2005 on Teachers and Lecturers. The remaining 55% still have a high school education or non-educational diploma. In addition, the same report shows that more than 30% of national ECE teachers have less than three years of teaching experience, so there is concern that they do not have sufficient practical skills in managing a classroom based on early childhood development needs. Locally, this condition is also reflected in the Periuk Sub-district, Tangerang City. Based on data from the local Education Office in 2024, only 35% of ECE teachers in this sub-district have met the minimum academic qualifications, and around 25% of them have less than three years of teaching experience. This imbalance has direct implications for the inconsistent quality of ECE services, where teachers with higher education but minimal experience struggle to implement adaptive learning approaches, while experienced but academically inexperienced teachers tend not to master the theoretical underpinnings that are essential in designing learning activities in line with the national curriculum. This fact shows a real gap between the regulative provisions and the reality on the ground, so this research is relevant and important to examine how the combination of academic qualifications and teaching experience affects the performance of ECE teachers, especially in the local context of Periuk Sub-district (Permata et al., 2022).

This imbalance can be caused by various factors, such as limited access to higher education for prospective ECE teachers, lack of ongoing training, and lack of incentives for teachers to improve their capacity (Putri Nazidah, 2021). These factors ultimately affect teachers' performance in developing students' potential. For example, teachers with low academic qualifications tend to have difficulty implementing innovative learning approaches, while less experienced teachers are often unable to manage classroom dynamics effectively (Mahartini & Tristaningrat, 2023).

According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, around 40% of ECE teachers in urban areas still do not have academic qualifications equivalent to D-IV or S-1 according to national standards. In the Periuk sub-district, data from the local education office shows that only 35% of ECE teachers have met these qualifications (Alamsyah et al., 2020). In addition, about 25% of the total ECE teachers in this sub-district have less than three years of teaching experience, which is often associated with low levels of community satisfaction with the quality of ECE education services.

Academic qualifications are formal educational achievements that a person has as a basic requirement in carrying out the teaching profession (Maulida & Afrianingsih, 2024). In this context, ECE teachers' academic qualifications include a theoretical and practical understanding of child development psychology, learning strategies, and classroom management. This qualification is the basis for carrying out teaching tasks professionally and creating an effective learning environment for early childhood (Sela Nurlaela et al., 2024).

Teaching experience refers to a teacher's direct involvement in the learning process, which includes the duration and quality of teaching practice (Christy et al., 2025). Experienced teachers tend to have better adaptability to student needs, skills in managing conflict, and creativity in delivering material (Nurpatimah & Saputra, 2022). These two variables, academic qualifications, and teaching experience, together are expected to improve teacher performance, which includes aspects of learning planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Various previous studies have highlighted the importance of academic qualifications and teaching experience in determining teacher performance. Research by Pranpantja et al. (2021) shows that academic qualifications significantly influence teachers' ability to implement a competency-based curriculum. Meanwhile, research by Maryam (2024) found that teaching experience contributes to the level of teacher confidence in handling students with special needs.

Based on some of the previous studies above, it seems that most researchers only focus on aspects of academic qualifications or teaching experience separately and focus less on the interaction between the two variables in influencing teacher performance. Therefore, to fill this gap, this study will focus more on the effect of the combination of academic qualifications and teaching experience on the performance of ECE teachers holistically.

Based on initial observations of ECE teachers in the Periuk Sub-district, it was found that there is a significant gap between teachers who have high academic qualifications but limited teaching experience and vice versa. This condition impacts the difference in the quality of learning received by students. Teachers with limited teaching experience are often unable to apply appropriate learning methods, while teachers with high experience but low qualifications show limitations in preparing curriculum-based teaching materials.

This study aims to analyze the effect of academic qualifications and teaching experience on the performance of ECE teachers in the Periuk Sub-district and provide strategic recommendations for improving the quality of ECE education through strengthening teacher capacity in academic and practical aspects.

METHODS

Research Design

This study was conducted using quantitative methods through an associative approach, which aims to identify the relationship between academic qualifications and teaching experience on the performance of ECE teachers in the Periuk District area (Sugiyono, 2018). A survey approach was used in this research design, with instruments in the form of structured questionnaires distributed directly to ECE teachers as research participants. All ECE teachers in the Periuk Subdistrict became the study population, and sample selection was carried out by purposive sampling by considering certain aspects, such as the level of education that has been taken and the duration of teaching experience (Sugiyono, 2019b). Data analysis was conducted using multiple linear regression techniques, which serve to test the effect of both independent variables simultaneously and partially on the dependent variable, with the support of statistical software.

Population and Sample

This study involved all 65 ECE teachers in the Periuk Sub-district as the population. Because the number is limited, a total sampling technique is used so that all teachers are used as respondents. This approach is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the influence of academic qualifications and teaching experience on ECE teacher performance (Sugiyono, 2019a, 2021).

Research Setting

This research was conducted during the period November 2024 to May 2025, located in Periuk Sub-district, an administrative area under Tangerang City, Banten Province. This area was chosen because it has a number of non-formal Early Childhood Education (ECED) institutions that are evenly distributed and actively organizing learning activities, making it relevant to the research focus on teachers' academic qualifications and teaching experience. The choice of location was based on several considerations, including the suitability of the research topic, namely the analysis of factors influencing the performance of ECE teachers, as well as the ease of access in obtaining the necessary data. In addition, the support of local education institutions and the openness of ECE institutions in the area to research activities were also strategic reasons that strengthened the feasibility of this location. The focus of the research was directed at institutions that have active teachers and meet predetermined criteria so that the results obtained are representative and relevant to the purpose of the analysis (Creswell, 2017).

Data Collection Instrument

In this study, data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire prepared based on

the Likert measurement model (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The scale has five levels of response with a specific score value that represents the respondent's level of agreement with each statement. The questionnaire was designed to evaluate three main variables, namely academic qualifications, teaching experience, and performance of early childhood teachers. Each variable consists of several items that describe specific indicators, such as the level of education pursued, length of experience in the teaching field, as well as the ability to develop lesson plans, implement learning, and conduct evaluations. Before being used in the study, the instrument went through a validity and reliability testing process to ensure that the measuring instrument was able to provide accurate and reliable results.

Table 1

Validity Test

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Question Item</i>	<i>r Count</i>	<i>Description</i>
Education Qualification (X1)	X1.1	0.811	VALID
	X1.2	0.826	VALID
	X1.3	0.854	VALID
Teaching Experience (X2)	X2.1	0.883	VALID
	X2.2	0.854	VALID
	X2.3	0.783	VALID
Teacher Performance (Y)	Y1.1	0.864	VALID
	Y1.2	0.935	VALID
	Y1.3	0.858	VALID

Source: SPSS Version 27 (2024)

Table 1 shows the validity test results for each question item on the variables of Educational Qualifications (X1), Teaching Experience (X2), and Teacher Performance (Y). Based on the results of the analysis using SPSS version 27, all question items have a calculated r value greater than the r table value (minimum standard of validity), so they are declared valid. For the Educational Qualification variable (X1), the calculated r-value ranges from 0.811 to 0.854, which indicates that all instrument items are able to measure the variable well. For the Teaching Experience variable (X2), the highest r value is 0.883, while the lowest is 0.783, which also indicates the validity of all items. Similarly, the Teacher Performance variable (Y), which has the highest r value of 0.935 and the lowest of 0.858, indicates that the instrument for this variable is highly valid.

Table 2

Reliability Test

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Cut-Off Value</i>	<i>Description</i>
Education Qualification (X1)	0.770	0.60	Reliable
Teaching Experience (X2)	0.792	0.60	Reliable
Teacher Performance (Y)	0.860	0.60	Reliable

Source: SPSS Version 27 (2024)

Table 2 presents the results of the reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha approach for each of the research indicators, namely educational qualifications, teaching experience, and teacher performance. All of these indicators obtained values above the 0.60 threshold, indicating that the instruments used have met the reliability standard. Educational qualifications obtained a value of 0.770, teaching experience 0.792, and teacher performance reached 0.860. These results show that all items in the instrument are able to provide stable and consistent results, so they are suitable for use in measuring research variables.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis in this study was carried out through a quantitative approach based on statistics, using SPSS version 27 software as the main tool. Before entering the main analysis stage, the data from filling out the questionnaire was tested first to see the level of validity and reliability of the instrument and to ensure that the measuring instrument really reflects the construct under study consistently and accurately. Afterward, descriptive analysis was conducted to provide an overview of the respondents' profiles and the patterns of responses. Multiple linear regression techniques were used to evaluate the relationship between formal education background and teaching experience with the performance level of ECE teachers. As part of the model feasibility procedure, a series of tests on classical assumptions were also carried out, including an examination of the normal distribution of data, potential relationships between independent variables, and homogeneity of residual variances (Ghozali, 2018). The overall analysis was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the contribution of each factor to the performance under study, both simultaneously and separately.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Periuk Sub-district is part of the education system designed to provide educational services for children aged 0-6 years, which includes formal, non-formal and informal education. Periuk Sub-district, located in Tangerang City, has seen rapid growth in the provision of early childhood education institutions in line with the increasing public awareness of the importance of early childhood education. ECE institutions in this area consist of various types, such as SPS, Playgroups, Kindergartens and Daycare Centers. Historically, ECE institutions in the Periuk sub-district have grown significantly since the government's policy of compulsory one-year pre-primary ECE in 2009. Supported by teacher training and certification programs, ECE in the Periuk sub-district continues to improve the quality of education services to support children's holistic growth and development.

Table 3

Informant Characteristics

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Age		
< 25 years old	10	15.4
25-35 years	35	53.8
> 35 years	20	30.8
Education Background		
High school/equivalent	5	7.7
Diploma	15	23.1
Bachelor degree (S1)	45	69.2
Teaching Experience		
1-5 years	15	23.1
6-10 years	25	38.5
11-15 years	15	23.1
16-20 years	10	15.4

Table 3 shows the characteristics of informants consisting of age, educational background, and teaching experience. The majority of informants are in the age range of 25-35 years with a frequency of 35 people (53.8%), indicating that most ECE teachers in Periuk Sub-district are at a productive age. In terms of educational background, the majority of informants have a Bachelor's degree (S1), with a total of 45 people (69.2%). In comparison, only 5 people (7.7%) have a high school education, indicating that most teachers have met higher academic qualifications. For teaching experience, most informants have 6-10 years of experience with a frequency of 25 people (38.5%), while the second most teaching experience is 1-5 years and 11-15 years with a frequency of 15 people (23.1%) each. This data shows that the majority of ECE teachers in the Periuk sub-district have sufficient teaching experience to support their competence in the learning process.

Classical Assumption Test

Normality Test

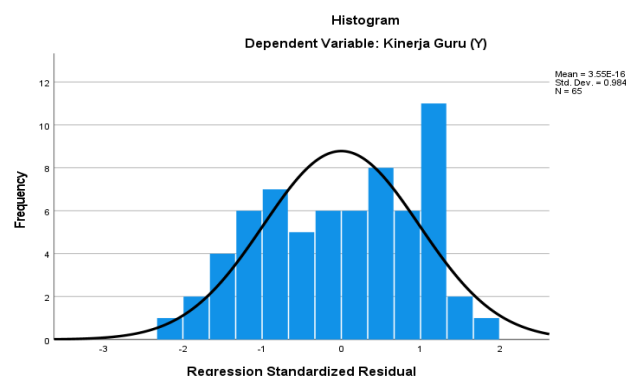


Figure 1. Histogram Normality Test

The histogram in the figure shows the distribution of standardized residuals for the dependent variable Teacher Performance (*Y*). This distribution follows a pattern close to a normal distribution, as shown by the normal curve above the histogram. The mean value of the residuals is very close to zero (Mean = 3.55E-16), and the standard deviation is 0.984, which indicates that the residual data is evenly distributed around the regression line. With the number of samples ($N = 65$), this distribution indicates that the normality assumption in the regression model is met, so the regression analysis can be considered valid for use in this study.

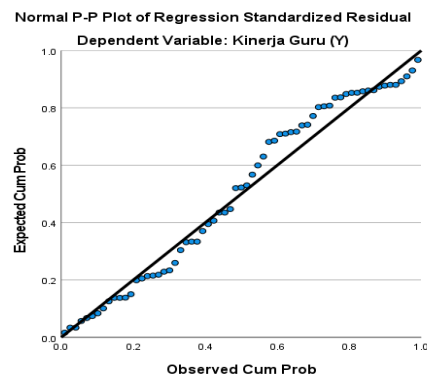


Figure 2. P-Plots Normality Test

Figure 2 shows the results of the normality test using the P-P Plot for the dependent variable Teacher Performance (*Y*). Based on the graph, the data points are mostly around the diagonal line, which indicates that the residual distribution is close to the normal distribution. This pattern indicates that the normality assumption for regression analysis has been met. With these results, the regression model can be considered valid in describing the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable in the study.

Multicollinearity Test

Table 4

Multicollinearity Test

	<i>Model</i>	<i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardized Coefficients</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Collinearity Statistics</i>	
		<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>			<i>Tolerance</i>	<i>VIF</i>
1	(Constant)	13.228	1.782		7.425	.000		
	Academic Qualification (X1)	-.017	.125	-.016	-.135	.893	.971	1.030
	Teaching Experience (X2)	-.324	.120	-.329	-2.699	.009	.971	1.030

a. Dependent Variable: Teacher Performance (*Y*)

Source: SPSS Version 27 (2024)

Table 4 shows the results of the multicollinearity analysis between the two independent factors, namely the level of formal education and experience in teaching, in relation to the performance of ECE educators. The test results show that the tolerance value is 0.971 and the (VIF) value is 1.030, both of which are within safe limits. This means that there is no indication of a strong relationship between the two independent variables in the regression model. In the absence of multicollinearity symptoms, the two factors can be analyzed simultaneously in the model without causing interference with the accuracy of predictions or interpretation of regression results.

Heteroscedasticity Test

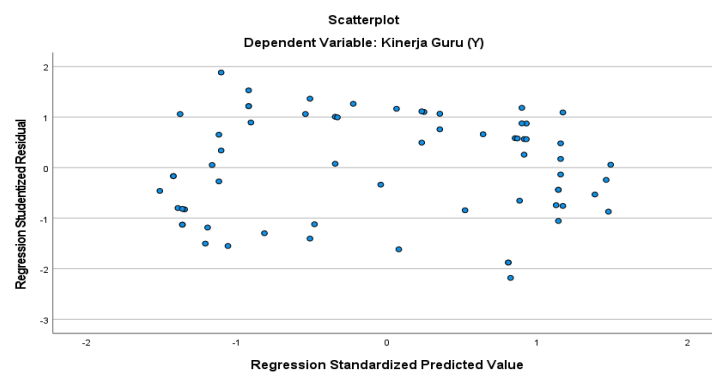


Figure 3: Heteroscedasticity Test Scatterplot

The visualization in Figure 3 shows the results of testing the similarity of the residual variance through a scatter graph between the standardized predicted value and the regression residual. It appears that the data points are scattered irregularly without showing any particular systematic pattern, such as clustering or clear direction. This random scatter pattern indicates that the deviations of the prediction results are evenly distributed, indicating no indication of inconsistent variance. Therefore, the requirement for the stability of the residual variance in the model has been met, so the regression model is considered suitable for use in the next stage of analysis.

Hypothesis Test

Table 5

T-test

<i>Model</i>		<i>Unstandardized Coefficients</i>		<i>Standardized Coefficients</i>		
		<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
1	(Constant)	13.228	1.782		7.425	.000
	Academic Qualification (X1)	.017	.125	.016	.135	.893
	Teaching Experience (X2)	.324	.120	.329	2.699	.009

a. Dependent Variable: Teacher Performance (Y)

Source: SPSS Version 27 (2024)

Referring to the statistical tests shown in Table 5, it is known that the level of formal education teachers have does not show a meaningful relationship to their performance achievement. This is indicated by the high significance value of 0.893 and the very small regression coefficient. This finding suggests that different levels of education, such as high school, undergraduate or postgraduate, have no real impact on the work effectiveness of ECE teachers in the Periuk area. There are likely other factors that determine teacher performance, such as practical skills, work commitment, or teaching methods used.

The results of the analysis of the experience variable show a strong influence on teacher performance. This is reflected in the low significance value of 0.009 and the large regression coefficient. This finding confirms that the longer a teacher is involved in early childhood education, the higher the quality of his or her performance. Real experience in the field gives teachers the ability to adjust their teaching approach, develop more effective learning strategies, and deal with classroom dynamics more confidently and adaptively. In other words, high flying hours are a key factor in shaping the professional excellence of early childhood teachers.

The Effect of Academic Qualifications on the Performance of ECE Teachers in Periuk District

Academic qualifications have long been used as a formal indicator to assess teachers' professional readiness. Still, in the context of early childhood education, teacher effectiveness is more determined by the ability to apply knowledge adaptively in dealing with complex classroom dynamics and unique learners. Formal, theoretical education often does not adequately equip early childhood teachers with the necessary practical skills, resulting in a gap between academic competence and actual ability in the field. Many teachers with higher education levels are not necessarily able to manage learning optimally. In contrast, teachers with lower educational backgrounds but experience are able to build strong emotional communication and create creative learning. Therefore, academic qualifications need to be balanced with practice-based contextual training in order to really have an impact on improving the performance of ECE teachers.

This research is in line with findings from (Sd & Siantar, 2025) which show that not all ECE teachers who have met the minimum academic requirements are able to display superior performance in the classroom. In their study, it was mentioned that the biggest challenge lies in the low relevance between the content of the curriculum in universities and the reality in ECE institutions. In addition, research (Harahap, 2025) also confirms that the quality of teaching is more influenced by teachers' awareness of updating skills and willingness to continue learning rather than simply meeting educational administrative requirements. Meanwhile, the results of a study conducted by (Saragih et al., 2025) did find a positive relationship between academic qualifications and curriculum implementation. However, the context of the study focused on basic education, not ECE, so it cannot be fully generalized to the early childhood level. These three studies show that the effect of academic qualifications on

teacher performance is contextual and cannot be understood singularly or absolutely.

In the context of early childhood education in Periuk Subdistrict, the fact that most teachers have taken higher education but have not fully demonstrated optimal performance indicates a gap between the theory obtained in college and the practice faced in the field. This situation demands a paradigm shift in the strategy for improving the quality of teaching staff, from focusing solely on achieving academic qualifications to a more comprehensive and applicable approach. Local governments together with educational institutions that organize ECE, need to design professional development policies that integrate theoretical aspects and practical skills. For example, teacher training should be designed contextually by presenting learning simulations, direct practice in the classroom, and reflective training based on case studies so that each teacher is able to internalize the theory they have in the form of real actions that are in accordance with the psychological, social and emotional conditions of early learners.

Teacher capacity building should no longer only be measured by the level of education attained but also by how well teachers are able to implement their knowledge in the form of creative, adaptive, and impactful learning. Teachers who are only armed with a degree without being supported by practical skills will find it difficult to provide meaningful learning experiences for children. Therefore, a transformation of the training system is needed that is not only theoretical but also empowers teachers through mentoring activities, collaborative supervision, and discussion spaces between educators to exchange experiences and strategies. Future policies to strengthen the capacity of ECE teachers should be oriented towards the formation of holistic competencies, where the academic background becomes the initial foundation that is strengthened by experience and adaptability to classroom dynamics. Such an approach is believed to be able to minimize the gap between academic qualifications and actual performance and accelerate the achievement of equitable and sustainable quality of early childhood education.

The Effect of Teaching Experience on the Performance of ECE Teachers in Periuk District

Teaching experience plays an important role in shaping the pedagogical intuition, emotional sensitivity, and social sensitivity of ECE teachers, which cannot be obtained instantly through formal education. Through long-term interactions in the classroom, teachers develop the ability to read situations, design intervention strategies, and adapt learning methods to children's psychological conditions and backgrounds. Experienced teachers are generally more systematic, initiative, and flexible in designing fun and meaningful learning activities and more sensitive in dealing with children's developmental barriers. They not only deliver the material but also build safe emotional relationships that support holistic learning. Thus, teaching experience is not just a duration of time but an accumulation of pedagogical and reflective values that tangibly improve the quality of ECE teachers' performance in all aspects of learning.

This finding is in line with the results of research (Simajuntak, 2025) which states that teachers who have high-flying hours tend to be more creative and dynamic in designing learning activities. (Simanjuntak et al., 2025) it also found that teaching experience increases teachers' confidence in dealing with students with special needs and developing an inclusive approach. Research (Susanti, 2025) also confirmed that the duration of the experience is directly proportional to the professional maturity of ECE teachers in handling children's behavioral challenges and building a conducive classroom environment. These three studies reinforce the conclusion that teaching experience is not just a supplement but a key foundation in shaping excellent teaching performance, especially in early childhood education, which is full of emotional nuances, imagination, and complexity of social relationships.

Based on the results of the study that showed the dominant influence of teaching experience on the performance of early childhood teachers, it can be concluded that learning gained from direct practice in the field is much more meaningful than mere theoretical knowledge. Teaching experience allows teachers to develop pedagogical intuition, understand the individual characteristics of learners, and design learning strategies that are more contextual and adaptive to the classroom situation. This is especially important in early childhood education, where emotional interaction, empathy, and social sensitivity are key to success in assisting children's growth and development. Therefore, experience is not only about the length of time teaching but also about the quality of teacher engagement in dealing with various learning dynamics and challenges. Through repeated experience, teachers will be better equipped to make the right pedagogical decisions, respond to individual children's needs, and create a safe and enjoyable learning climate.

To support this, ECE teacher professional development strategies need to be directed at creating learning spaces based on reflective experiences. This can be realized through mentoring programs that involve senior teachers as mentors for newer teachers, resulting in the transfer of contextual knowledge that is not obtained in college. In addition, training designed with a case study-based approach or collaborative learning will encourage teachers to analyze real situations and discuss and formulate solutions based on collective experiences. Performance evaluation should not only refer to administration and completion of learning documents but also pay attention to teachers' ability to apply effective methods in the classroom, build strong relationships with learners, and demonstrate flexibility in the face of change. By giving a greater portion to strengthening teaching experience, ECE teachers will become not only technically competent educators but also resilient, reflective, and empowered individuals in shaping future generations.

Research Implications

Based on the results of the study show that teaching experience has a significant influence on the performance of ECE teachers. In contrast, academic qualifications do not have a significant effect;

an important implication that can be drawn is the need for a review of the approach to coaching and developing the competence of ECE teachers who have been more focused on meeting formal academic levels. Local governments, educational institutions, and teacher training providers need to shift the focus of coaching towards improving quality teaching experience through programs such as internships, practice-based training, mentoring between teachers, and contextual learning reflection forums. This is important so that teachers not only have adequate academic backgrounds but also pedagogical competencies that are honed through real interactions with students.

The findings in this study provide strategic input for policymakers, especially in formulating the recruitment system and developing the competence of ECE teachers. Teachers' practical experience largely determines success in educating early childhood. Hence, education providers and PAUD institutions need to make teaching experience an important parameter in the recruitment process and career path. High teaching hours reflect a teacher's professional maturity, adaptability, and capacity to manage complex classroom situations. Therefore, the selection of prospective teachers should not only be based on educational certificates but also consider teaching track record, ability to face real challenges, and concrete evidence of contribution to learning. Similarly, in promotions, experience should be the main benchmark because it is directly related to the quality of pedagogical leadership and the ability to be a role model for peers and students.

Higher education institutions, as educators of ECE, also play a central role in creating graduates who are ready to face the realities of the field. The academic curriculum applied in higher education needs to be adjusted to the real challenges faced by teachers in the classroom so that the learning process is not trapped in theory alone. Integration between academic approaches and field practice can be realized through intensive internship programs, collaboration with professional ECE institutions, and real performance-based assessment in children's learning environments. ECE study program students should be equipped with observation competencies, child communication skills, character-based classroom management, and response to the individual needs of learners. Thus, graduates not only have a diploma but also practical skills and professional sensitivity that are ready to be applied in the field. Transforming the higher education curriculum to be more applicable will ensure that prospective ECE teachers truly can become agents of change in early childhood education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the Academic Qualification variable (X1) does not have a significant influence on ECE Teacher Performance (Y) in Periuk Sub-district. This indicates that teachers' formal education level, such as high school, bachelor's degree, or master's degree, does not directly impact their performance. In contrast, the Teaching Experience variable (X2) shows a significant influence on ECE Teacher Performance. The more teaching experience teachers have, the better their performance in the aspects of lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation.

This result confirms the importance of direct experience in the field as a major factor in supporting ECE teachers' performance.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that education institutions and local governments pay more attention to developing teachers' practical experience through training, workshops, or mentoring programs that allow teachers to gain learning from real experience. In addition, although academic qualifications did not have a significant effect in this study, it is still important to encourage teachers to continue their formal education to a higher level to broaden their horizons and abilities in facing evolving learning challenges. The combination of strong field experience and improved academic quality will create more competent and professional ECE teachers in the future.

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