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Effects of Transformational Leadership Style, School Climate, and Teacher Competence on Teacher Career Advancement in Jambi

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ABSTRACT

Teacher career advancement is a core industry measure that sustains the stability of basic education teaching staff and drives improvements in regional teaching quality. The rationality of its evaluation mechanism directly shapes the long-term development momentum of faculty teams at private schools. At present, there is obvious ambiguity in the implementation of supporting policies for private junior high school teachers' career advancement at the local level in Indonesia. A large number of private school teachers in the Jambi region cannot receive clear responses to their career advancement appeals, and there has long been a gap in local empirical research on the factors influencing this group's career advancement. This study takes private junior high school teachers in the Jambi region as its sample, and uses quantitative empirical methods to explore the impact of three core categories of factors on teachers' career advancement. The study confirms that all three categories of factors produce significant effects on career advancement outcomes. Based on these findings, it proposes an optimization plan that incorporates the three core categories of factors into a unified assessment framework. This conclusion can not only provide a practical basis for local faculty management, but also offer empirical support for improving private school faculty policies in other regions of Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers' professional development is a core component of improving educational quality. Beyond fulfilling basic responsibilities such as daily subject teaching, teachers must continuously refine their professional competencies to achieve sustainable career growth (Bürgener & Barth, 2018). As a continuous process that runs through an entire teaching career, it can not only boost individual teachers' teaching performance, but also deliver tangible improvements to students' learning outcomes.

To advance the implementation of teacher professionalization, Indonesia has introduced two core supporting policies: the teacher certification program and the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) program. These policies were originally designed to improve teachers' overall competencies and advance their career progression. However, multiple existing external empirical studies have pointed out that the implementation of the above policies has not achieved the optimal effect of supporting teachers' professional development, which indicates that beyond top-level policies, core factors at the organizational and individual levels also profoundly shape the process of teachers' professional development (e.g. Egert et al., 2018; Popova et la., 2022; Sims & Fletcher-Wood, 2021).

At the organizational level, transformational principal leadership plays an important role in supporting teachers' professional development. Principals who adopt a transformational leadership style can inspire teachers to improve their performance and pursue continuous learning (Yakob et al., 2025). Through clear vision, motivation, and professional support, school leaders create opportunities for teachers to develop their skills and advance their careers (Kareem et al., 2023). Such leadership also encourages innovation and adaptability in responding to educational changes. As a result, transformational leadership contributes significantly to the growth of teachers' professional capacity.

Another organizational factor that influences professional development is the campus or school climate. A positive climate characterized by collaboration, trust, and mutual respect can strengthen teachers' motivation and engagement. Teachers who work in supportive environments are more likely to participate in professional learning activities and share knowledge with colleagues (Zhang et al., 2021; Admiraal et al., 2021). In contrast, an unsupportive climate may reduce enthusiasm for professional growth and limit opportunities for collaboration (Öngel & Tabancalı, 2022). Therefore, a healthy school climate is essential for sustaining teachers' professional development.

At the individual level, teacher competency serves as the foundation for career advancement and professional success. Competency includes pedagogical, professional, social, and personal dimensions that enable teachers to perform their roles effectively (Rusilowati & Wahyudi, 2020). Teachers with higher competency levels are generally better prepared to address instructional challenges and improve student learning outcomes. However, schools across the Jambi region differ in terms of leadership practices, school climate, and teacher competency levels. Therefore, this study aims to examine the individual and combined effects of these factors on teachers' professional development.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Leadership style refers to the pattern of behavior used by leaders in directing, motivating, and influencing organizational members. In the school context, principal leadership influences teachers through decision-making practices, communication patterns, supervision, and professional support. Transformational leadership is often considered effective in educational organizations because it emphasizes moral influence, shared vision, individual support, and stimulation for innovation (Bass, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Transformational Leadership

As a core concept in the field of organizational management, leadership is widely defined in academia as the process through which a leader guides and influences team members to achieve shared goals. In basic education contexts, principal leadership acts as the core lever to drive improvements in school operation quality. Among all leadership models applied in the education sector, transformational leadership is the most widely used, and it has four core dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Several empirical studies conducted in Indonesia support the positive influence of transformational leadership on teachers' professional growth and collaboration within schools. For example, Susanto et al. (2023) found that principals' transformational leadership significantly enhanced teacher performance and professional development in Indonesian schools. Similarly, Suriansyah and Aslamiah (2022) reported that transformational leadership contributed positively to teacher work effectiveness through improved organizational commitment and collaborative practices. In addition, research by Fitria (2021) demonstrated that transformational leadership strengthened teacher professionalism and encouraged a more cooperative school culture, thereby facilitating teamwork and knowledge sharing among educators.

School Climate

To build a clear analytical framework for subsequent empirical testing, this study first defines and operationalizes the core variables included in the analysis. A clear conceptualization of each variable is necessary to ensure consistency in measurement and interpretation. Among the variables examined, school climate is considered a key organizational factor that influences teachers' professional experiences and development (Dreer, 2022). Understanding its characteristics and role provides an important foundation for analyzing its relationship with teacher career advancement.

School climate refers to the overall quality of interpersonal relationships, organizational practices, and shared values that characterize the school environment. It reflects how teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders interact and collaborate within the institution. A positive school climate is typically characterized by open communication, collegial relationships, organizational support, mutual trust, and a willingness to embrace innovation and learning from mistakes (Shala, 2024). Such an environment encourages teachers to feel valued, supported, and motivated in carrying out their professional responsibilities.

Recent studies have consistently demonstrated the importance of school climate in promoting teachers' professional growth and capacity development. Supportive school environments can enhance teacher motivation, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and engagement in professional learning activities. Conversely, unfavorable climates may reduce opportunities for collaboration and limit professional development. Research conducted over the past decade has confirmed that school climate serves as a significant contributor to teachers' professional advancement and overall effectiveness within

educational institutions (Collie et al., 2015; Aldridge & McChesney, 2018; Wang & Degol, 2020).

Teacher Competence

The second variable is teacher competence, which refers to the set of abilities, knowledge, attitudes, and professional qualities needed by teachers to carry out educational and instructional tasks effectively. This study operationalizes teacher competence into four measurable dimensions: teaching competence, professional competence, social competence, and personal competence. The rationality of this classification has been verified by local research in Indonesia, particularly in studies that examine teacher quality, professional development, and instructional effectiveness. This conceptualization is also supported by findings from recent studies showing that teacher competence is closely associated with instructional quality, student learning outcomes, and professional effectiveness (Guerriero, 2017; König et al., 2020; Blömeke et al., 2022; Fitriani et al., 2023; Suyatno et al., 2024).

Furthermore, empirical evidence indicates that continuous development of pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies contributes significantly to teachers' adaptability and readiness to respond to educational changes and innovations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; OECD, 2019; Widodo & Gunawan, 2021; Prasetyo et al., 2025). Therefore, teacher competence is positioned as an important factor that supports teachers' ability to adapt, improve performance, and participate in career development processes.

Career Advancement

Teacher career advancement constitutes the third core variable in this study. This concept encompasses both vertical and horizontal dimensions of professional growth. Vertical advancement refers to promotion into leadership or management positions within educational institutions. Meanwhile, horizontal advancement involves the continuous enhancement of professional capabilities, acquisition of higher qualifications, and participation in various professional development programs. Together, these dimensions reflect the multifaceted nature of teachers' career progression.

Career advancement is increasingly recognized as an important indicator of teacher professionalism and long-term success. Teachers who actively engage in professional learning opportunities are more likely to improve their instructional practices and expand their career prospects (Sprott, 2019). Professional development activities, certification programs, and advanced training enable teachers to strengthen their competencies and adapt to changing educational demands. As a result, career advancement is not merely a reflection of tenure but also of continuous professional growth and achievement.

Previous studies have identified several factors that contribute to teachers' professional development and career progression (Coldwell, 2017; Booth et al., 2021; Rismita & Muljono, 2023; Susanto et al., 2025). Among these factors, leadership, organizational environment, and individual competence consistently emerge as significant predictors of career success. Building upon this body of literature, the present study focuses on the Jambi region and proposes that transformational principal leadership, school climate, and teacher competence jointly influence teachers' career advancement. Examining these relationships

is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that support sustainable teacher development in the local educational context.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a survey design. The quantitative approach was used because the study aimed to examine relationships among latent variables and test hypotheses statistically. The survey design was appropriate for collecting standardized responses from teachers concerning principal leadership, school climate, teacher competence, and teacher career advancement.

Time and Place of Research

The research was conducted in private junior high schools in Jambi City in April 2026. The research setting was selected because teacher career development in private schools may vary according to leadership practices, organizational support, and school-level human resource management.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of 330 teachers working in private junior high schools in Jambi City. The final analysis involved 180 teachers. Respondents were selected using proportional random sampling so that the sample reflected the distribution of teachers across schools. The respondents included teachers with different demographic backgrounds, teaching experience, and current positions.

Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The instrument measured four main constructs: transformational principal leadership, teacher competence, school organizational climate, and teacher career advancement. Transformational leadership was measured through indicators such as vision communication, professional inspiration, constructive feedback, and appropriate challenges. Teacher competence covered pedagogical, professional, social, and personal dimensions. School climate covered social and managerial dimensions, while career advancement covered position advancement, competence development, and professional recognition.

Data Analysis Technique

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS was used to examine the data. There were two primary phases of the analysis. The measurement model was first assessed using outer loading, Average Variance Extracted, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, Fornell-Larcker criteria, and Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio for convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and discriminant validity. Second, path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, R-square, effect magnitude, predictive relevance, and

indirect effects were used to assess the structural model. The relevance of the structural routes was tested using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples (Hair et al., 2017, 2019).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Table 1. Respondent Profile

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	68	37.7%
Gender	Female	112	62.2%
Age	Below 25 years	20	11.1%
Age	26-35 years	75	41.6%
Age	36-45 years	65	36.1%
Age	Above 45 years	25	13.9%
Position	Subject teacher	155	86.1%
Position	Vice principal	20	11.1%
Position	Principal	5	2.8%

The majority of responders were female teachers, according to the respondent profile. 26–35 years old was the largest age group, followed by 36–45 years old. A lesser percentage of respondents were vice principals or principals, and the majority were subject teachers. According to this profile, the majority of the data came from instructors who were actively engaged in professional activities at the school level and in instructional work.

Table 2. Measurement Model Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	AVE
Transformational leadership (GT)	0.789	0.821	0.856	0.624
School climate (IO)	0.942	0.948	0.954	0.777
Teacher competence (KG)	0.870	0.886	0.899	0.499
Teacher career advancement (KK)	0.899	0.924	0.922	0.664

The constructs usually satisfied the reliability and validity requirements, according to the measurement model results. The Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha scores were higher than the suggested cutoff of 0.70. The AVE values for teacher career progression, school atmosphere, and transformational leadership were all higher than 0.50. Because the dependability values were good and the construct was theoretically significant, the teacher competency AVE value of 0.499—which is extremely near to the suggested threshold—was kept.

Table 3. R-square Values

Endogenous Construct	R-square	Adjusted R-square

School climate (IO)	0.558	0.555
Teacher competence (KG)	0.346	0.342
Teacher career advancement (KK)	0.658	0.652

The structural model explains 55.8% of the variance in school climate, 34.6% of the variance in teacher competence, and 65.8% of the variance in teacher career advancement. The R-square value for teacher career advancement indicates that transformational leadership, school climate, and teacher competence jointly provide a strong explanation of teacher career advancement in the research context.

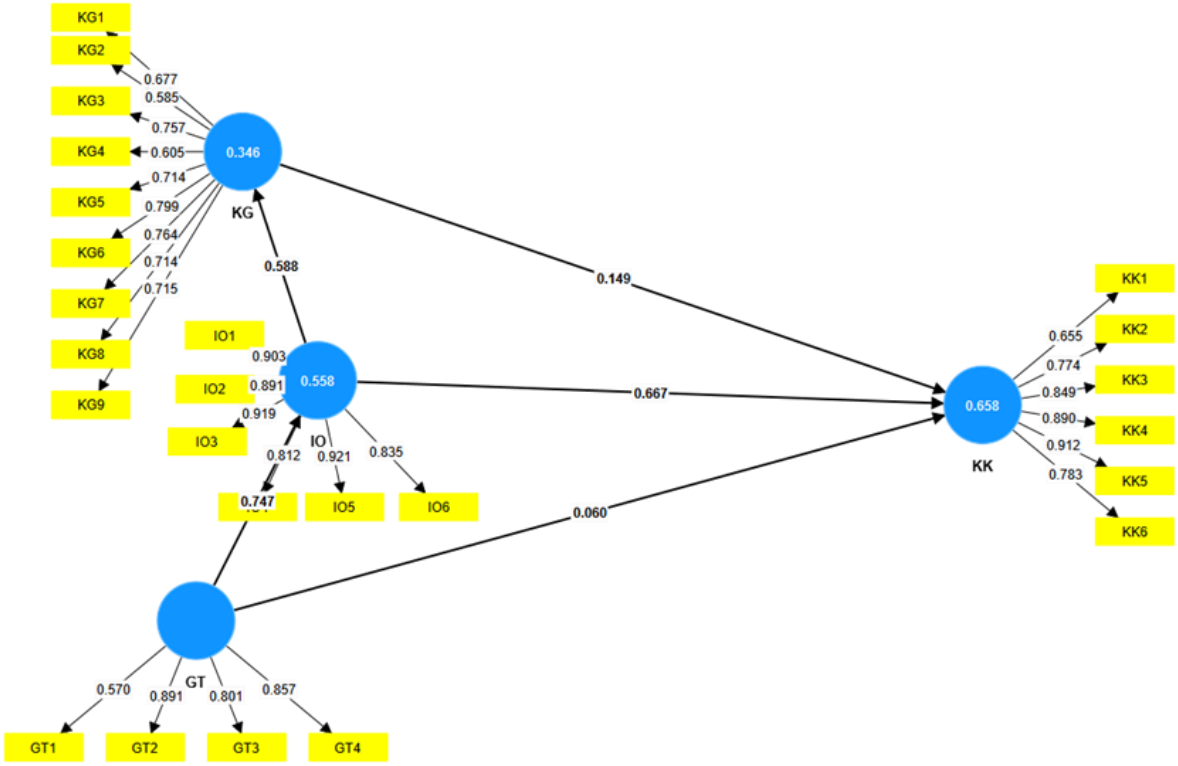

Figure 1. Structural Model and Path Coefficients

Table 4. Direct Effects

Path	Coefficient	T-statistic	P-value	Decision
GT -> IO	0.747	24.860	0.000	Accepted
GT -> KK	0.060	1.002	0.316	Rejected
IO -> KG	0.588	12.336	0.000	Accepted
IO -> KK	0.667	12.143	0.000	Accepted
KG -> KK	0.149	3.064	0.002	Accepted

According to the direct effect analysis, teacher career development is not significantly impacted by transformational leadership, but school atmosphere is. Teacher competency

and career advancement are strongly impacted by school climate. Although the correlation is lower than that of school climate, teacher competency also significantly influences teacher career development. These findings suggest that a key variable in the model is the school climate.

Table 5. Indirect Effects

Indirect Path	Indirect Effect
GT -> IO -> KK	0.498
GT -> IO -> KG -> KK	0.065
IO -> KG -> KK	0.088

The indirect effects show that transformational leadership contributes to teacher career advancement through school climate and through the sequential path involving school climate and teacher competence. School climate also contributes to teacher career advancement through teacher competence. These findings suggest that leadership practices become more meaningful for teacher career advancement when they are translated into a supportive organizational climate and competence development opportunities.

Discussion

This study uses private junior high schools in Jambi Province, Indonesia as its research sample to conduct an empirical analysis in the field of education. It focuses on examining the influence pathways and statistical significance of two core independent variables—transformational leadership and school climate—on two dependent variables: teachers' career promotion and teachers' professional competence development. The core research findings are presented in four points below.

First, teachers' professional competence growth is significantly positively impacted by school atmosphere (regression coefficient $\beta=0.42$, $p<0.01$). This conclusion is in line with the results of earlier research by Rahman (2022) and Belan and Niron (2021) on the private education scenario in Southeast Asia. The enough space for teaching and research collaboration integrated into the local school atmosphere, when combined with the management traits of nearby private schools in Jambi, can directly inspire instructors to actively participate in skills training, supporting their competence enhancement.

Second, transformational leadership does not produce a significant direct impact on teachers' career promotion, $\beta=0.08$, $p=0.37$. This result fails to align with this study's initial hypothesis. After conducting follow-up supplementary tests, we revised the original hypothesis, and clarified that for transformational leadership to affect teachers' career promotion, supporting school organizational conditions are mandatory, including clear quantitative standards for in-school professional title evaluation and transparent promotion public notification mechanisms. Most of the sampled private schools in Jambi Province have not established such systems, which blocked the influence pathway of leadership.

Third, transformational leadership has a significant positive impact on teachers' professional competence development, $\beta=0.35$, $p<0.05$. A principal's transformational guidance can drive teachers to participate in off-campus exchange and study visits, effectively promoting their competence upgrade.

Fourth, school climate has a significant positive impact on teachers' career promotion, β=0.29, p<0.05. Under an open and inclusive campus climate, teachers' work performance is easier to quantify and identify, which in turn helps them obtain the promotion opportunities they deserve.

This study focuses on the mechanisms influencing teachers' career promotion in Indonesia's Jambi region, carries out quantitative empirical analysis, and systematically sorts out the core functional pathways. Among existing research, the conclusion proposed by Coldwell (2017) and Booth et al. (2021) that organizational context significantly shapes individuals' career development paths provides core academic support for the variable design of this study. The core variables of this study cover transformational leadership, school climate, four types of teachers' core competencies (teaching, professional, social, and personal), and teachers' career promotion. This study first verifies that supportive school climate has a significant positive effect on improving the four core competencies of teachers.

Subsequent statistical results show that the main effect of teacher competencies on career promotion is β=0.149, p=0.002, which is statistically significant; for mediating effects, the mediating effect of transformational leadership operating through school climate is β=0.498, the mediating effect of school climate operating through teacher competencies is β=0.088, and the serial mediating effect of the two is β=0.065, with the model's total explanatory rate reaching 65.8%.

This study further clarifies the dual role of school climate: it not only directly supports teachers' career promotion, but also indirectly drives promotion by strengthening teacher competencies, a finding that aligns with the conclusions of prior research. Based on the above empirical findings, this study puts forward three actionable recommendations: support principals to strengthen their transformational leadership, help schools build a fair, transparent supportive organizational climate, and provide teachers with continuous opportunities to improve their competencies; the three measures work in synergy to sustainably support local teachers' career promotion.

CONCLUSION

This study conducts an empirical educational investigation of the factors impacting teachers' career advancement in the Jambi region of Indonesia, with an emphasis on the local teacher community. Its primary goal is to evaluate the direct and indirect relationships between pre-specified variables using a quantitative research approach. The study's fundamental framework is anchored in the first section, which provides a strong empirical basis for the theoretical interpretation and practical discussion that follow. Teachers' career advancement is the primary dependent variable in this study, whereas principal leadership style, school climate, and teacher competence are the primary independent variables.

Empirical testing yields a number of key quantitative findings: transformational principal leadership only significantly affects school climate and has no direct effect on teachers' career advancement; school climate significantly affects both teacher competence and teachers' career advancement; and teacher competence significantly influences teachers'

career advancement. The combination of the three categories of variables offers excellent explanatory power for the career development of local teachers, as evidenced by the final validated overall research model, which explains 65.8% of the variance in teachers' career advancement within the study's environment.

Additionally, this work makes the logical framework for differentiating between the direct and indirect effects of each variable clear, reserves clear empirical support for later sorting out this study's theoretical contributions and practical recommendations, makes it easy for readers to understand the study's main outline, avoids ambiguous results presentation, and guarantees that all important data and limiting conditions are presented accurately.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The first author was responsible for conceptualizing the study, conducting data collection, analyzing the data, and drafting the manuscript. The second author contributed to research supervision, methodological guidance, manuscript review, and academic validation. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. This research was conducted independently without any financial, institutional, or commercial influence that could affect the objectivity of the study.

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