

MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC – METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL



MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC – METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL

<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>



A COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH TO ENHANCING THE MANAGERIAL COMPETENCE OF DIRECTORS IN PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

Maksudjan Abdullayevich Yuldashev

Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences, Professor

Jizzakh State Pedagogical University

E- mail: maksmuzb@gmail.com

Jizzakh, Uzbekistan

ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: public-private partnership, preschool education, managerial competence, preschool director, competency-based approach, educational leadership, strategic planning, institutional governance, professional development, quality assurance.

Received: 05.08.26

Accepted: 06.08.26

Published: 07.08.26

Abstract: This article examines the enhancement of managerial competence among directors of preschool educational organizations operating within public-private partnership frameworks. The study identifies the key competencies required for effective leadership in contemporary PPP-based preschool education, including strategic planning, organizational coordination, decision-making, communication, financial and resource management, digital leadership, stakeholder collaboration, and quality assurance. Particular attention is given to the need to balance public educational standards with private-sector principles of efficiency, accountability, flexibility, and institutional sustainability.

The article presents a competency-based approach that integrates managerial knowledge, practical leadership skills, professional values, reflective practice, and continuous professional development. This approach is intended to strengthen directors' capacity to manage institutional resources effectively, support staff development, maintain educational quality, cooperate with families and external partners, and respond to changing regulatory, technological, and social demands. The study argues that the systematic

enhancement of managerial competence can improve governance, organizational performance, accountability, and the long-term sustainability of preschool institutions functioning within public-private partnership settings. The proposed approach may also serve as a methodological foundation for designing professional development programmes, training modules, mentoring systems, and competency assessment criteria for preschool directors.

Introduction. The expansion of public-private partnership (PPP) mechanisms in preschool education has created new opportunities for improving access, infrastructure, service quality, and institutional efficiency. At the same time, this model has significantly increased the managerial responsibilities of preschool directors. Unlike traditional preschool institutions, PPP-based organizations operate at the intersection of public educational requirements, private-sector management principles, financial accountability, stakeholder expectations, and quality assurance. As a result, the effectiveness of such institutions increasingly depends not only on pedagogical leadership but also on the director's ability to manage human, financial, organizational, and technological resources in an integrated and strategic manner.

Contemporary preschool directors are therefore expected to demonstrate a broad range of professional competencies. These include strategic planning, decision-making, team leadership, communication, conflict management, financial and resource management, digital literacy, monitoring, quality assurance, and cooperation with families, local authorities, and private partners. The growing complexity of these functions shows that traditional approaches to professional development, which often focus mainly on administrative procedures or general theoretical knowledge, may no longer be sufficient. Directors require a structured system of competence development that connects professional knowledge with practical managerial performance, reflective practice, institutional goals, and changing educational demands.

A competency-based approach provides an appropriate framework for addressing this need because it focuses on what managers are able to apply effectively in real professional situations rather than only on what they know theoretically. In the context of PPP preschool education, managerial competence can be understood as an integrated combination of knowledge, practical skills, professional values, personal qualities, and the capacity to make contextually appropriate decisions. Such an approach also allows management development to

be linked with measurable indicators, professional standards, training outcomes, and institutional performance.

The need for a competency-based model is particularly relevant because directors of PPP preschool educational organizations must simultaneously ensure educational quality and institutional sustainability. They are required to comply with public regulations while also using resources efficiently, responding to parental expectations, maintaining productive relationships with private partners, supporting staff development, and introducing innovative management practices. These responsibilities demand a management model that is flexible, practice-oriented, and responsive to the specific characteristics of the public-private partnership environment.

Despite the increasing importance of PPP in preschool education, the systematic development of directors' managerial competencies remains an area requiring further theoretical and practical elaboration. In particular, there is a need to identify the core competencies necessary for effective leadership, determine mechanisms for their development, and establish how professional training can be organized around competency-based principles. Addressing these issues can contribute to strengthening leadership capacity, improving organizational effectiveness, and enhancing the overall quality of preschool education.

Therefore, this article aims to develop and theoretically substantiate a competency-based model for improving the management skills of directors of public-private partnership preschool educational organizations. The proposed model focuses on the integration of strategic, organizational, communicative, financial, digital, analytical, and reflective competencies and is intended to provide a methodological basis for professional development, competency assessment, and the continuous improvement of managerial practice in PPP preschool education.

Literature Review. The quality and sustainability of preschool education depend not only on curriculum, infrastructure, and teaching resources but also on the effectiveness of institutional leadership. Contemporary research increasingly considers the director of a preschool educational organization not merely as an administrator but as an educational leader responsible for pedagogical quality, staff development, organizational culture, resource management, and cooperation with families and external stakeholders. A review by Douglass (2019) concludes that leadership has a central role in improving and sustaining process quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings and emphasizes the importance of appropriate preparation and continuing professional development for leaders.

International studies also demonstrate that the responsibilities of preschool leaders are multidimensional. OECD evidence from TALIS Starting Strong indicates that ECEC leaders divide their time between administrative and pedagogical functions and that stronger engagement in pedagogical leadership is associated with staff attitudes and professional practices linked to educational quality. Distributed leadership and staff participation in institutional decision-making are likewise associated with greater professional collaboration and job satisfaction. These findings suggest that effective preschool management cannot be reduced to routine administration; it requires a combination of organizational, pedagogical, communicative, and leadership competencies.

Recent OECD research further strengthens this argument. Findings from TALIS Starting Strong 2024 emphasize the importance of leaders' preparation, professional development, autonomy, resource conditions, distributed responsibility, support for staff learning, and capacity to foster innovation. Leadership development is therefore increasingly viewed as an important element of both system quality and workforce stability in preschool education. This perspective provides a strong foundation for applying a competency-based approach to the professional development of preschool directors.

Within a competency-based framework, professional effectiveness is understood through the integration of knowledge, practical skills, professional values, decision-making abilities, and the capacity to perform effectively in authentic workplace situations. For preschool directors, this means that managerial development should go beyond theoretical knowledge of regulations and administrative procedures. It should include the ability to plan strategically, lead teams, allocate resources, resolve problems, communicate with stakeholders, use digital technologies, monitor institutional performance, and reflect critically on management decisions. Consequently, a competency-based model requires clearly defined competency domains, developmental mechanisms, observable indicators, and assessment criteria.

Another important dimension identified in the literature is the relationship between leadership and staff development. OECD findings show that leadership practices can shape the organizational climate in which educators collaborate, participate in decision-making, develop professionally, and implement pedagogical improvements. Leaders themselves also require sustained professional support, particularly in areas associated with policy changes, regulatory requirements, staff management, and institutional responsibilities. This implies that professional development for preschool directors should not be organized as isolated short-

term training but as a continuous process involving workplace learning, mentoring, collaborative problem solving, reflection, and feedback.

The importance of management competence becomes even greater in preschool organizations functioning within a public-private partnership model. PPP institutions combine public educational objectives with organizational and resource-management mechanisms involving private actors. Directors in such settings may therefore be expected to reconcile educational quality with institutional sustainability, regulatory compliance, efficient use of resources, accountability, stakeholder communication, and partnership coordination. This institutional complexity makes strategic management, financial literacy, negotiation, risk management, and stakeholder engagement particularly important components of managerial competence.

The governance dimension is also relevant. UNICEF emphasizes that improving the quality of early childhood education requires attention to governance, monitoring, evaluation, accessibility, and institutional quality mechanisms. In a PPP environment, these dimensions require directors to work across organizational boundaries and maintain accountability to several groups simultaneously, including public authorities, private partners, teaching staff, parents, and local communities. Accordingly, leadership effectiveness depends increasingly on the director's capacity to integrate pedagogical and managerial objectives rather than treating them as separate domains.

Digital competence has also become an important component of preschool leadership. Contemporary educational management requires directors to use digital tools for documentation, communication, monitoring, staff coordination, professional learning, and institutional decision-making. In Uzbekistan, preschool reforms have included new quality-assurance mechanisms, alternative service-delivery models, curriculum renewal, teacher support, and digital solutions for children, parents, and educators. These developments increase the need for preschool directors who are able not only to operate digital technologies but also to integrate them strategically into organizational management.

The Uzbek context is particularly significant for the present study because preschool education has undergone substantial expansion and institutional transformation. UNICEF reports that preschool enrolment in Uzbekistan increased from below 30% in 2017 to more than 75% in 2025, alongside reforms involving policies, quality-assurance mechanisms, curriculum development, teacher support, and alternative models of preschool provision. As access expands and organizational models diversify, the competencies required of preschool directors become correspondingly more complex. Quantitative expansion therefore needs to

be accompanied by the systematic development of leadership capacity if quality is to be maintained.

The reviewed literature indicates several major competency domains relevant to the management of PPP preschool educational organizations: strategic and organizational competence; pedagogical leadership; human-resource and team-management competence; communicative and stakeholder-management competence; financial and resource-management competence; digital competence; quality-assurance and analytical competence; and reflective professional competence. These domains are interconnected rather than independent. Strategic decisions influence resource allocation; staff leadership affects pedagogical quality; stakeholder communication affects institutional trust; and monitoring provides evidence for further managerial decisions.

However, an important gap remains. Much of the existing literature considers ECEC leadership, professional development, governance, or organizational quality separately. There is comparatively less attention to an integrated competency-based model specifically designed for directors working within public-private partnership preschool education, where pedagogical leadership must coexist with financial, contractual, regulatory, and partnership-related responsibilities. This creates a need for a model that identifies the specific competencies required in PPP settings and connects them with appropriate professional-development mechanisms and measurable performance indicators.

Therefore, the present study builds on existing research on ECEC leadership and competency development while extending it to the specific organizational conditions of public-private partnership preschool education. The proposed model conceptualizes managerial competence as an integrated professional capacity developed through the interaction of knowledge, practical experience, leadership skills, reflection, and continuous learning. It seeks to provide a systematic framework for strengthening directors' ability to ensure educational quality, manage institutional resources, develop staff capacity, cooperate with stakeholders, and respond effectively to the changing demands of preschool education.

Materials and methods. This study employed a qualitative and model-development research design to formulate a competency-based framework for strengthening the management skills of directors of preschool educational organizations operating under public-private partnership arrangements. The methodological approach combined theoretical analysis, competency mapping, comparative analysis, and structural modelling in order to identify the managerial capacities required for effective leadership in PPP-based preschool education.

The materials of the study included scholarly literature on educational leadership, preschool management, competency-based professional development, public-private partnership mechanisms, organizational effectiveness, quality assurance, and professional development of education managers. Regulatory and methodological documents related to preschool education management and institutional governance were also considered where relevant to the conceptualization of directors' professional responsibilities. These materials were used to determine the major functions, challenges, and competency requirements associated with the management of PPP preschool institutions.

A systematic conceptual analysis was conducted to identify recurring dimensions of managerial competence. The identified competencies were grouped into several interconnected domains: strategic and organizational management, communication and leadership, financial and resource management, digital competence, quality assurance, stakeholder collaboration, decision-making, and reflective professional development. Particular attention was paid to competencies that distinguish PPP-based preschool management from conventional administrative leadership, including the ability to coordinate public and private interests, manage resources efficiently, maintain accountability, and sustain cooperation with multiple stakeholders.

Comparative analysis was used to examine differences between traditional administrative approaches and competency-based management development. This made it possible to shift the focus from formal managerial functions and knowledge acquisition toward observable professional performance, problem-solving ability, adaptability, and context-sensitive decision-making.

Based on the results of the theoretical and comparative analyses, a competency-based model was constructed. The model consists of four interrelated components: a target component, defining the goals and expected outcomes of managerial development; a content component, identifying the core management competencies; a process component, describing professional development mechanisms such as training, mentoring, case analysis, reflective practice, and workplace-based learning; and an evaluation component, providing criteria and indicators for assessing competency development.

The study also applied structural-functional modelling to determine the relationships between the components of the proposed model. The model assumes that management competence develops progressively through the integration of theoretical knowledge, practical application, professional reflection, and continuous feedback. Competency development is therefore viewed as an ongoing process rather than a one-time training outcome.

For analytical purposes, the effectiveness of the proposed model was considered through three competency levels: basic, developing, and advanced. These levels reflect directors' ability to understand managerial principles, apply them in routine professional situations, and independently manage complex institutional challenges in PPP settings.

The methodology was designed to provide a conceptual basis for future empirical validation of the model. Subsequent studies may test the proposed framework through questionnaires, interviews, observation, expert assessment, and pre- and post-training evaluation among directors of PPP preschool educational organizations. Such empirical application would allow the model's diagnostic criteria, developmental mechanisms, and practical effectiveness to be further refined.

Results and discussion. The analysis of the theoretical literature, competency requirements, and managerial functions of directors of public-private partnership (PPP) preschool educational organizations made it possible to develop a competency-based model structured around interconnected managerial domains. The results indicate that the effectiveness of a PPP preschool director cannot be explained by administrative knowledge alone. Effective management requires the integration of strategic, organizational, communicative, financial, digital, analytical, and reflective competencies.

The proposed competency-based model represents a shift from an administrative understanding of preschool management toward a broader conception of educational leadership. In traditional administrative models, directors are primarily expected to ensure compliance, complete documentation, supervise staff, and implement instructions. In contrast, the competency-based model views the director as a strategic leader, organizational developer, resource manager, communicator, quality controller, and reflective professional.

This distinction is especially important within public-private partnership preschool institutions. PPP organizations operate under conditions in which directors must coordinate educational priorities with organizational sustainability. They may interact simultaneously with government bodies, private partners, staff, parents, and local communities. Consequently, management decisions frequently involve multiple interests and require greater flexibility than conventional administrative routines.

The proposed model therefore places particular emphasis on strategic management and stakeholder competence. A director should not merely respond to current institutional problems but should be capable of anticipating future needs, setting measurable objectives, identifying risks, and mobilizing resources.

Another significant component is financial and resource-management competence. Preschool directors working in PPP settings need at least a functional understanding of budgeting, resource allocation, cost-effectiveness, accountability, and institutional sustainability. Although financial decisions may involve specialized staff, directors remain responsible for ensuring that educational priorities are adequately supported by organizational resources.

Digital competence also represents an increasingly important dimension of modern preschool management. Digital tools can support documentation, communication, monitoring, attendance management, staff coordination, parent engagement, and institutional analysis. Digital competence should therefore be interpreted not simply as the ability to use technology but as the ability to select and apply digital tools strategically for management purposes.

The results of the conceptual analysis further indicate that quality assurance should occupy a central position in the management model. Effective directors need to use evidence when evaluating staff performance, educational processes, parent satisfaction, resource use, and institutional development. Monitoring should therefore be connected with decision-making rather than functioning merely as a reporting requirement.

A further finding concerns the significance of reflective competence. Management decisions in preschool education are highly contextual, and predetermined administrative rules cannot provide solutions to every professional situation. Directors need to critically analyse their decisions, evaluate their consequences, identify weaknesses, and modify their practice. Reflective competence therefore connects professional experience with continuous managerial learning.

The results of the model-development process suggest that managerial competence in PPP preschool education should be conceptualized as an integrated professional construct rather than a set of separate administrative skills. Strategic, organizational, communicative, financial, digital, analytical, and reflective capacities interact continuously in real management practice.

The proposed model offers three main contributions. First, it defines the core competencies required for directors of PPP preschool educational organizations. Second, it connects these competencies with specific professional-development mechanisms. Third, it provides criteria and developmental levels that can be used to assess progress.

The model can consequently serve as a foundation for designing professional development programs, diagnostic instruments, certification mechanisms, mentoring systems, and competency assessment frameworks for directors of PPP preschool institutions.

Future empirical research should test the model with directors from different regions and organizational contexts. A particularly strong research design would involve an experimental and control group, pre- and post-intervention competency assessments, expert evaluations, and statistical comparison of changes. Such evidence would make it possible to determine not only whether directors perceive improvement but also whether the model produces statistically and practically significant changes in managerial performance.

Conclusion. This study has developed a competency-based model for strengthening the management skills of directors of preschool educational organizations operating within public-private partnership frameworks. The findings indicate that effective leadership in PPP preschool education requires more than administrative knowledge and compliance with institutional regulations. Directors need an integrated set of strategic, organizational, communicative, financial, digital, analytical, stakeholder-management, and reflective competencies that enable them to respond effectively to the complex demands of contemporary preschool governance.

The proposed model integrates four interrelated components: target, content, process, and evaluation. Its main strength lies in connecting clearly defined managerial competencies with practical professional development mechanisms, including training, mentoring, coaching, case-based learning, digital learning, peer collaboration, and reflective practice. The model also introduces a developmental assessment framework based on basic, developing, and advanced competency levels, making it possible to diagnose professional needs and monitor managerial growth systematically.

The analysis further demonstrates that management competencies should not be developed in isolation. Strategic planning is closely related to financial and resource management; digital competence supports monitoring and quality assurance; leadership competence strengthens staff motivation and stakeholder cooperation; and reflective practice contributes to continuous professional improvement. Therefore, professional development programs for PPP preschool directors should be comprehensive, practice-oriented, and responsive to the specific organizational context in which directors work.

A competency-based approach can contribute to stronger institutional governance, more efficient use of resources, improved staff management, better cooperation with families and public and private partners, and more systematic quality assurance. In this respect, developing directors' managerial competencies should be regarded as an important condition for ensuring both the sustainability of public-private partnership mechanisms and the quality of preschool educational services.

The proposed model provides a conceptual and methodological foundation for designing training programs, diagnostic tools, professional standards, mentoring systems, and competency assessment mechanisms for preschool directors. Further empirical research should validate the model through experimental implementation, pre- and post-intervention assessment, expert evaluation, observation, and statistical analysis across different types of PPP preschool organizations.

Overall, the study concludes that the effectiveness of public-private partnership preschool education is closely associated with the professional capacity of its leaders. Systematic development of directors' management competencies can transform the director from a primarily administrative manager into a strategic educational leader capable of ensuring institutional effectiveness, educational quality, innovation, accountability, and sustainable development.

References:

1. Douglass, A. L. (2019). Leadership for quality early childhood education and care. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 211. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/6e563bae-en>
2. OECD. (2020). Building a high-quality early childhood education and care workforce: Further results from the Starting Strong Survey 2018. OECD Publishing.
3. OECD. (2025). TALIS Starting Strong 2024 conceptual framework. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/f49228be-en>
4. OECD. (2025). Results from TALIS Starting Strong 2024: Strengthening early childhood education and care. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/20af08c0-en>
5. OECD. (2025). Developing leadership in early childhood education and care settings. In Results from TALIS Starting Strong 2024: Strengthening early childhood education and care. OECD Publishing.
6. Douglass, A., Halle, T., Banghart, P., & Tout, K. (2022). Recognizing and supporting early childhood educators and program administrators as agents of change: An exploration of distributed leadership in early care and education. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families.
7. Andersen, L. B., Bjørnholt, B., Bro, L. L., & Holm-Petersen, C. (2018). Achieving high quality through transformational leadership: A qualitative multilevel analysis of transformational leadership and perceived professional quality. *Public Personnel Management*, 47(1), 51–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091026017747270>

8. UNICEF. (2024). Raising the quality of early childhood education and care: Strengthening governance, monitoring and evaluation. UNICEF.
9. UNICEF Uzbekistan. (2022). Towards achieving universal early childhood education in the Republic of Uzbekistan. UNICEF Uzbekistan.
10. UNICEF Uzbekistan. (2026). Early childhood education. UNICEF. The source reports that preschool enrolment in Uzbekistan increased from below 30% in 2017 to more than 75% in 2025 and describes reforms in quality assurance, curriculum, alternative delivery models, and digital solutions.
11. Bush, T. (2020). Theories of educational leadership and management (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
12. Northouse, P. G. (2021). Leadership: Theory and practice (9th ed.). SAGE Publications.
13. Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(1), 5–22.
14. Spencer, L. M., & Spencer, S. M. (1993). Competence at work: Models for superior performance. John Wiley & Sons.
15. Boyatzis, R. E. (1982). The competent manager: A model for effective performance. John Wiley & Sons.
16. Mulder, M. (2014). Conceptions of professional competence. In S. Billett, C. Harteis, & H. Gruber (Eds.), *International handbook of research in professional and practice-based learning* (pp. 107–137). Springer.
17. Eraut, M. (1994). Developing professional knowledge and competence. Routledge.
18. Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional development and teacher change. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 8(3), 381–391.
19. Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). Effective teacher professional development. Learning Policy Institute.
20. Hallinger, P. (2011). Leadership for learning: Lessons from 40 years of empirical research. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 49(2), 125–142.