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Analysis of the Role of Traffic Police Competence in Efforts to Reduce Congestion Levels on Highways

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Abstract

Traffic congestion is a common problem faced by transportation modes in Indonesia, including Makassar City. This study aims to analyze the role of traffic police competence in reducing road congestion. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were obtained through in-depth interviews and participant observation with Makassar City Police Traffic Unit personnel and road users. The results show that traffic police competence, including technical skills, communication skills, digital technology mastery, and professionalism, significantly influences the effectiveness of traffic control. Although most personnel have adequate understanding and experience, there is variation in task implementation, particularly in mastery of technological systems and educational approaches to the public. This study concludes that competency improvement must be accompanied by continuous training, equitable distribution of resources, and cross-sectoral institutional synergy to achieve more efficient traffic management.

INTRODUCTION

Traffic congestion is one of the main problems facing transportation modes in Indonesia (Indira et al., 2019). This phenomenon not only hampers public mobility but also causes economic losses, increased air pollution, and psychological stress for road users (Hardiani and Lenni, 2024). In this context, efforts to reduce congestion levels depend not solely on road infrastructure or the number of vehicles, but are also greatly influenced by effective traffic management, one of which is through the role of competent traffic police (Polantas) (Fitrah et al., 2024).

Traffic police are the spearhead of road regulation, supervision, and enforcement (Abbas et al., 2020). Traffic police duties are not only technical, such as regulating traffic flow at intersections, but also encompass strategic aspects such as designing temporary traffic engineering, educating drivers, and responding to accidents (Fitrah et al., 2024). In carrying out these tasks, personnel competence is crucial (Alima and Alie, 2024). This competence includes technical knowledge, operational skills, communication skills, and mastery of traffic information technology (Shaulin and Faeique, 2023). Without adequate competence, it is feared that actions taken will not have a real impact on reducing congestion (Denny and Ginung, 2023).

While various training programs and system modernizations have been introduced by the police, a major question remains: the extent to which the current competence of traffic police officers can significantly contribute to reducing congestion (Dabaghchian et al., 2019). Numerous cases demonstrate that congestion is not always caused by vehicle volume, but rather by a lack of firm enforcement, low road user discipline that is not optimally monitored, and weak cross-sector coordination (Aulia, 2023). Therefore, an in-depth analysis of how traffic officer competence plays a role in this context is necessary (Hamadeh et al., 2021).

This observation aims to systematically analyze the relationship between competence and the effectiveness of congestion reduction efforts. Focusing on competency, it examines how officers' knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes impact improved traffic management. Furthermore, it identifies the challenges faced by traffic police in carrying out their daily duties to reduce congestion on the highways.

Makassar faces serious challenges when it comes to traffic congestion. Data from the TomTom Traffic Index 2025 shows that although the city isn't among the top five most congested cities in Indonesia, Makassar residents experience significant delays, especially during the morning and evening rush hours. A study by Hasanuddin University and the Makassar Transportation Agency recorded that economic losses due to congestion reached Rp.21 billion per day in 2024 – equivalent to approximately Rp.7.65 trillion per year (Makassar Police, 2025). This surge was triggered by the massive growth in the number of private vehicles, estimated at around 500,000 units, 75% of which were motorcycles. Public transportation user volume showed a drastic decline: from 18% to only 8.6% in the last decade. Due to low public transportation utilization, more than 237 roads in the city have been categorized as major congestion points. A study of AP roadsPettarani, a major corridor, recorded a very low average travel speed of around 439 seconds for short distances, indicating a deterioration in the road's level of service. A long traffic jam on the road occurred as late as 4:05 p.m. WITA in December 2024.

Overall, these statistical indicators demonstrate that congestion in Makassar is a long-term problem that deserves serious attention. This is not only a matter of increased travel times, but also of economic impacts, severe congestion on major roads, and a mobility pattern that relies heavily on private vehicles.

The above facts highlight the crucial role of traffic police competency in enforcing traffic regulations, managing traffic flow, interacting with citizens, and managing critical situations. Their effectiveness is closely linked to their ability to assess road conditions, regulate traffic flow distribution, provide on-the-ground education, and utilize communication technology to reduce traffic congestion. The Makassar City traffic congestion data above provides a strong foundation for analyzing the effectiveness of traffic police interventions in reducing congestion in priority areas.

Traffic congestion has long been a crucial issue in urban development (Hamadeh et al., 2024). Various literature suggests that congestion is not only seen as a result of the increasing number of vehicles but also as a result of suboptimal traffic management, including the quality of on-site supervision and control. In this context, the role of traffic police is crucial, as they are the primary actors in directly maintaining order and smooth traffic flow (Karmila and Gilang, 2023). Their competence is a crucial variable in determining the success of congestion reduction efforts (Ikhwan, 2020).

Traffic police competency can be viewed from various perspectives. According to the competency theory developed by Spencer and Spencer (2019), competency encompasses not only technical knowledge and skills but also attitudes, values, and interpersonal skills that support a person's performance in specific work situations. In the context of their duties, competent personnel must possess a deep understanding of traffic regulations, be able to make quick decisions in the field, be skilled in communicating with road users, and be open to the use of technology in carrying out their duties (Indira et al., 2019).

Along with technological advancements, the competence of traffic police officers has also expanded in meaning. In recent years, the implementation of the electronic ticketing system

(Electronic Traffic Law Enforcement/ETLE) has become a modernization effort that requires not only technical skills but also adaptation to information technology. A study by Hardiani and Lenni (2024) shows that the implementation of ETLE has helped improve driver compliance with traffic signs and reduced physical interactions between officers and violators. However, the success of ETLE still depends on the personnel's ability to understand and manage the system digitally. This underscores the importance of digital competence in carrying out the duties of the Traffic Police today.

In addition to technical and digital aspects, inter-agency coordination is also a crucial competency in traffic management. Research by Alima and Alie (2024) highlighted that coordination between the Transportation Agency and the police plays a strategic role in managing traffic flow, particularly during peak hours and at congestion-prone areas. These findings reinforce the assumption that organizational competence, the ability to collaborate across sectors, and effective communication are integral elements of traffic police professionalism.

On the other hand, limited human resources and facilities also impact the effectiveness of traffic police. A study by Fitrah Ramadhan et al. (2024) showed that the large number of congestion points to monitor was not matched by an adequate number of personnel, resulting in suboptimal oversight. In such situations, managerial skills and prioritization are essential competencies.

Equally important is the educational aspect of traffic police duties. Research by Hardiyani and Lenny (2024) found that traffic police play a central role in providing guidance to novice drivers, especially teenagers. This confirms that interpersonal competencies such as communication skills, a humanistic approach, and empathy are also crucial to the long-term effectiveness of the police's role, not only in the context of directly regulating traffic flow but also in fostering a culture of traffic discipline within the community (Rahmadanti, 2023).

In general, various studies and literature indicate that traffic police competency in efforts to reduce congestion must be viewed multidimensionally (Saputra, 2022). This competency encompasses technical, digital, social, and organizational aspects (McCarthy and O'Neil, 2021). A comprehensive understanding of these dimensions allows traffic police capacity building policies to be designed more precisely and have a real impact on improving traffic flow in various regions across Indonesia.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, aiming to provide an in-depth description of traffic police competency in reducing road congestion. This qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore societal dynamics and institutional behaviors that cannot be measured numerically alone, as well as to fully understand the context of traffic police officers' work in real-world situations.

The research location is Makassar City, a metropolitan city in eastern Indonesia with a high vehicle growth rate and complex traffic problems. This city is a relevant location due to its dense traffic, particularly during rush hour in business districts, educational centers, and traditional

markets. Furthermore, the presence of active traffic police units at various strategic points was the basis for this location selection.

The data in this study were collected through two main methods: in-depth interviews and participant observation. Interviews were conducted with several key informants, including traffic police officers under the Makassar City Police Traffic Unit, officials from the Transportation Agency, and road users who frequently interact with traffic police. The interviews were semi-structured to allow researchers to dig deeper into the conversation. In addition, researchers also conducted direct observations of traffic police performance at several congestion-prone areas, such as Jalan Urip Sumoharjo, Jalan Perintis Kemerdekaan, and the area around the Makassar Flyover.

Data analysis used thematic analysis techniques, which grouped data based on key themes emerging from interviews and observations. Each piece of data was transcribed, coded, and then classified into categories such as: types of competencies demonstrated in the field, obstacles to task implementation, and strategies implemented to alleviate congestion. The data triangulation process was carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and official documents such as Traffic Unit performance reports, vehicle volumes, and congestion points. With this research design, it is hoped that a comprehensive picture can be obtained regarding the real contribution of traffic police competencies in controlling congestion, identifying aspects that need to be strengthened to increase the effectiveness of personnel's roles in the future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A description of the current state of traffic police competency in Makassar City and their contribution to efforts to reduce congestion levels. Based on the results of in-depth interviews and participant observations, it was identified that the technical and non-technical competencies of traffic police personnel show quite striking diversity, particularly in aspects of traffic flow control skills, technology use, and communication approaches to the public.

Table 1
Core of Informant Interview

Initials Informant	The Role of Traffic Police Competence	Traffic Congestion Conditions	Interview Results	Analysis	Interpretation
MDR	Knowledge	Not Too Congested	Traffic police know when to act, and they already know	Officers understand local traffic characteristics	The role of traffic police competence from the level of knowledge

			the traffic jam patterns.		contributes to more effective traffic management.
	Skills	very congested	Even though there is a traffic jam, traffic police must take quick action when vehicles break down or there are long queues.	Technical skills but vehicle volume challenges remain dominant	Need infrastructure support to support officer skills
	Professional Attitude	Busy and smooth	The police are polite and firm, so road users are reluctant to break the law.	Professional attitude increases road user compliance	The positive attitude of the traffic police has a direct impact on the smooth flow of traffic.

Table Connection

Initials Informant	The Role of Traffic Police Competence	Traffic Congestion Conditions	Interview Results	Analysis	Interpretation
MIS	Knowledge	Not too congested	Already know where the dense points are, so the police are on alert early	Knowledge-based anticipation helps prevent traffic jams	Situational knowledge is important in the daily duties of traffic police
	Skills	very congested	The officer immediately directed me to an alternative route, which was quite helpful.	Adaptive skills have proven effective in managing the flow	Quick and skilled action affects the smooth flow of traffic
	Professional Attitude	Busy and smooth	Even though it was busy, it still ran smoothly because they managed it patiently and firmly.	A professional attitude influences the behavior of road users	High work ethics strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of traffic regulation.
RBN	Knowledge	Not too congested	When there are police,	Officers' knowledge	The presence of competent

			people become more orderly. They know the rules, so they follow them.	creates a psychological effect on road users.	officers creates spontaneous compliance.
	Skills	very congested	Even though there is a serious traffic jam, the driver can still regulate the flow so that you don't get stuck for long.	Technical intervention in critical conditions is still necessary	Congestion mitigation skills become a critical element during high volumes.
	Professional Attitude	Busy and smooth	The traffic police are friendly, but when they have to be firm they don't hesitate	Professionalism with a humanistic approach	A balanced attitude increases the effectiveness of traffic communication.
QTY	Knowledge	Not too congested	They know the vulnerable hours and immediately stand guard there	Utilizing peak time information is an effective tactic	Operational knowledge has a direct impact on congestion prevention.
	Skills	very congested	Police usually immediately open additional lanes or direct large vehicles	Operational strategy based on technical skills	Rapid response based on technical skills has an impact on traffic congestion control.
	Professional Attitude	Busy and smooth	If you speak well, people will obey you and not get angry.	Professionalism in interactions builds trust	Communicative and professional behavior encourages voluntary compliance by road users.

Researchers interviewed informant MDR, a senior officer who has served for more than 10 years in the Makassar City Police Traffic Unit. He stated that in carrying out his duties, he often encounters traffic jams on Jalan Perintis Kemerdekaan, especially during work hours. Traffic police immediately take manual action when traffic lights are no longer effective, create temporary

diversions, and quickly coordinate with the Transportation Agency if there are vehicles parked haphazardly.

These findings indicate that despite sufficient technical understanding, interpersonal competencies such as persuasive communication and a humanistic approach are not evenly shared by all personnel. This is reinforced by observations at several congestion-prone areas, where most traffic control is still carried out manually, without the support of real-time information systems. This demonstrates the importance of personal integrity and work motivation as competencies that directly impact the quality of traffic services. Furthermore, almost all informants from the traffic police stated that limited personnel are a major obstacle in carrying out their duties. During a single shift in densely trafficked areas, the number of officers is often disproportionate to the volume of vehicles they must control. Officers must also multitask, such as regulating traffic, taking action, and directly answering public inquiries, all of which require comprehensive competency.

In general, traffic police personnel have an adequate understanding of traffic control regulations and strategies. However, there is variation in the level of technical and non-technical skills among members, particularly in terms of technology use and communication approaches to the public. One important finding is that officers in the field have developed a number of adaptive strategies to deal with congestion situations, especially at points that frequently experience congestion such as Jalan Urip Sumoharjo, Jalan Veteran Selatan, and around the flyover area. These strategies include manually regulating traffic flow when traffic lights are ineffective, temporary diversions, and rapid coordination with the Transportation Agency to regulate illegal parking and broken-down vehicles. However, not all personnel have shown the same readiness to improvise, indicating differences in individual competency levels.

Regarding technological proficiency, the majority of traffic police officers stated they generally understand the mechanisms of ETLE and CCTV-based surveillance systems, but not all are directly involved in their management. Those involved in traffic control centers demonstrated a higher level of competence in operating digital devices, but these skills are still not evenly distributed across operational units. This is reinforced by observations, which show that officers' interactions with digital systems generally occur at the coordination level, while implementation in the field remains manual.

In terms of communication with the public, most officers demonstrated a relatively humane approach when reprimanding minor violations. However, there were also cases where officers tended to adopt an authoritative approach without any educational efforts, especially when dealing with uncooperative drivers. This difference in approach appears to be related to individual

experience and training, reaffirming the importance of developing interpersonal competencies. Furthermore, interviews also indicated that limited personnel are a major obstacle in monitoring congestion points. In a single shift on several main roads, there are only 2–3 active personnel, an inadequate number compared to the volume of traffic. Several respondents stated that the increased workload, disproportionate to resources, has reduced their effectiveness in the field. The following is a summary matrix of the interview results with informants:

Table 2
Interview Results Summary Matrix

Informant's Initials	Position/Role	Length of Service/Status	Main Theme	Response Summary
MDR	Senior Traffic Police	>10 years	Manual setting strategy during traffic jams	He explained that spontaneous diversions and coordination are often used when systems are not working. Not all members are able to act quickly due to varying experience.
MIS	Junior Traffic Police	2 years	Communication with road users	Feeling unsure about interacting with drivers during conflicts. Feeling that communication training is still lacking.
RBN	Officer at the ETLE Control Center	5 years	Mastery of traffic technology	He explained that only a small percentage of members have a technical understanding of the ETLE system. Most have never received specific training in digital systems.
QTY	Road users (car drivers)	-	Public perception of traffic police	While appreciating the police presence at vulnerable locations, he noted that not all officers displayed the

Informant's Initials	Position/Role	Length of Service/Status	Main Theme	Response Summary
				same work ethic. Some appeared indifferent.

Source: Interview data, 2025.

The competence of traffic police in Makassar City plays a crucial role in managing traffic flow and reducing congestion, although several challenges remain. Adequate technical competence enables officers to effectively direct traffic in emergency situations, but this competence is not always supported by ongoing training, particularly in the use of digital devices, which are increasingly becoming a basic requirement in modern traffic management. Spencer & Spencer's competency theory classifies officer competence into three main categories: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Officers' knowledge of traffic regulations and traffic management strategies is generally considered adequate, while technical skills and professional attitudes still show variation. This is consistent with the literature from McCarthy and O'Neill (2021), which emphasizes the importance of regular training and refresher training to maintain the quality of traffic police work in the digital era.

The gap in technological mastery also highlights the need for a systemic approach to developing the digital competency of traffic police. As the OECD (2022) report points out, digital transformation in the police sector is not only about technology procurement but also about the readiness of its human resources. Without a comprehensive training program, a system like ETLE will remain merely symbolic and will not achieve its full impact.

From a communication and humanistic perspective, this study found that interpersonal competence plays a significant role in shaping driver behavior. Educational interactions are more acceptable to the public and can even foster collective awareness of the importance of orderly traffic. This reinforces findings from the World Bank (2021), which show that a "community policing" approach to traffic is more effective for long-term change than simply repressive law enforcement.

Constraints related to personnel numbers and limited facilities are also important. Unbalanced workloads and a lack of infrastructure support hinder the optimization of personnel's true competencies. Adjusting resource allocation policies and strengthening collaboration with other agencies are crucial steps in addressing this issue. A study by Daniel & Surugiu (2020) shows that successful traffic management in Eastern European cities relies on a multi-level system, where police work in harmony with city planners and public transport authorities.

The results of this study confirm that traffic police competency cannot exist in isolation. It must be supported by a structured training system, adequate personnel distribution, technological

support, and strong institutional synergy. The role of competency becomes significant when combined with a conducive work environment and active participation from the public as road users.

CONCLUSION

Traffic police competencies play a central role in controlling and reducing congestion, particularly in vulnerable areas such as central business districts, flyovers, and busy main roads. These competencies extend beyond technical skills in traffic management to encompass communication skills, mastery of information technology, rapid decision-making, and a strong work ethic and moral responsibility in carrying out their duties. Research reveals that these competencies are not evenly distributed among all personnel.

Variations occur primarily in technological mastery (such as ETLE), public communication skills, and readiness to take independent action in the field. Senior officers generally have better adaptive strategies, while new officers still require mentoring and further training. Limited personnel, facilities, and high workloads also hinder optimal competency implementation. Successful congestion control cannot be solely the responsibility of field personnel; it also requires a continuous training system, technological updates, and strong cross-sectoral coordination between the Traffic Police, the Transportation Agency, and road users.

Several recommendations can be put forward, including the need for a continuous and tiered training program for traffic police officers, particularly in public communication, stress management in the field, and the use of digital systems such as ETLE and CCTV. Training should be tailored to each officer's experience level and position. The police need to review the ratio of personnel to assigned areas, particularly in areas with high congestion. Increasing the number of operational personnel in the field and providing adequate logistical support will improve the efficiency of the traffic police.

Congestion control efforts must be carried out collaboratively. System integration between the Traffic Police, the Transportation Agency, and other agencies is needed in the form of an integrated traffic forum, for faster and more synergistic decision-making. The use of digital traffic systems such as ETLE and the Traffic Management Center (TMC) needs to be expanded beyond the control center level to include field officers. Each officer should understand the system's workflow to ensure more responsive monitoring and enforcement. Traffic police institutions should develop measurable competency indicators and conduct periodic evaluations. These evaluations can form the basis for promotions, rotations, or the formulation of human resource development policies within the police force. Thus, efforts to reduce traffic congestion are not merely short-term technical matters but become part of a systemic reform in more professional and competency-based urban traffic management.

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