

Original Article

Strategy for Improving the Competency of Islamic Religious Education Teachers Through a Continuous Professional Development Program

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Abstract

This study aims to identify and analyze effective strategies for improving the competency of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers through a continuous professional development program. PAI teacher competency is crucial in shaping the character and religious values of students. However, there are still challenges in implementing appropriate programs to improve these competencies, especially in an era of rapid change and the needs of 21st-century education. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study method in several secondary schools that have implemented professional development programs. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, which were then analyzed thematically. The results showed that effective competency development strategies encompass several key aspects, namely: technology-based training, collaboration between teachers, coaching through academic supervision, and providing constructive feedback. In addition, the involvement of school principals and education supervisors plays a significant role in creating an environment that supports continuous learning for PAI teachers. A planned and structured continuous professional development program can improve PAI teachers' understanding of innovative learning methods and their ability to face challenges in the classroom. The conclusion of this study emphasizes the importance of implementing systematic and sustainable strategies to improve PAI teacher competency in order to achieve better educational goals.

Keywords: Teacher Competence, Islamic Religious Education, Professional Development.



Introduction

Improving teacher competency is one of the keys to the success of quality education, particularly in the context of religious education. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in schools plays a role not only in imparting religious knowledge to students but also aims to shape character in accordance with Islamic values. Therefore, PAI teachers are required to possess competencies encompassing knowledge, skills, and attitudes that align with the goals of character education (Arifin, 2021). However, the reality on the ground shows that many teachers still face limitations in implementing the curriculum effectively, particularly in using relevant learning methods and media in the digital era. With the changing times, a comprehensive strategy is needed to improve the competency of PAI teachers through continuous professional development programs.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is an effort to continuously improve teachers' skills, both through formal training and informal activities such as group discussions, seminars, or collaboration between teachers. This program aims not only to develop technical teaching skills but also to enrich teachers' understanding of the social, cultural, and technological dynamics that influence learning (Azra, 2022). Through continuous professional development, teachers are expected to adapt to evolving student needs and increasingly complex societal demands. This program is highly relevant in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) education because teachers are required to deliver religious material in an engaging, applicable, and relevant manner for students at various levels of education.

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher competency is not solely determined by academic ability but also encompasses spiritual and moral dimensions. This competency encompasses extensive knowledge of Islam, the ability to translate Islamic values into daily life, and the ability to address ethical challenges in teaching (Hasan, 2023). Therefore, strategies for developing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher competency need to be designed holistically, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. A comprehensive continuing professional development program could include training on the use of technology in learning, the development of active learning methods, and enhancing teachers' understanding of religious moderation appropriate to the current context (Hidayat, 2020).

Efforts to improve Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher competency face significant challenges. Common obstacles to implementing continuous professional development include a lack of school support, limited teacher time, and limited access to relevant training materials. Furthermore, challenges persist related to varying levels of teacher understanding and skills in adopting learning technology, a key requirement today. Therefore, a strategic approach that considers various conditions and limitations is necessary to ensure effective and comprehensive competency development (Husni, 2022).

One strategy that can be implemented in professional development programs is technology-based training. The use of technology in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is becoming increasingly important in the digital era, where students tend to be more familiar with digital devices and social media (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021). This training can help Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers utilize technology as an engaging and interactive learning medium, such as using educational videos, learning apps, and e-learning platforms. This allows teachers to present Islamic Religious Education (PAI) material in a more creative and contextual manner, thus engaging students and making it easier for them to understand the material (Madjid, 2023).

In addition to technology-based training, another strategy that can be implemented is increasing collaboration between teachers through learning communities or working groups. These communities can serve as a forum for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to share experiences, teaching methods, and challenges faced in teaching PAI (Muslih, 2023). Through collaboration, teachers can support and inspire each other, and gain new insights that may not be available through formal training. Collaboration between teachers also allows for reciprocal learning, which can enrich collective teaching skills and encourage innovation in learning (Nazir, 2021).

Academic supervision from the school is also a crucial component of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher competency development strategy. This supervision serves not only as oversight but also as a form of guidance and evaluation for teachers. Through effective supervision, schools can provide constructive feedback to teachers, enabling them to understand their strengths and areas for improvement in their teaching. Support from the principal and education supervisor is also crucial in creating an environment conducive to the continuous development of teacher competencies (Rahmat, 2020).

Furthermore, providing training in innovative learning methods can also be part of a strategy to improve the competency of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. Active learning methods, such as group discussions, *problem-based learning*, or *role-playing*, have been proven effective in encouraging students to be more active in the learning process (Ridwan, 2022). Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers who are skilled at applying these methods can help students better understand religious values through more enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences. Thus, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning becomes more than just memorizing theory, but also a platform for developing positive attitudes and behaviors in accordance with Islamic teachings (Said, 2022).

On the other hand, competency development also requires Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to actively participate in professional development programs, maintaining their motivation to participate in them. This internal motivation is crucial because ongoing professional development programs will yield optimal results if teachers have a desire to continuously learn and develop (Suyanto, 2023). Active participation and a willingness to adapt to change are key indicators of success in improving teacher competency. Therefore, schools should also provide appreciation and recognition to teachers who demonstrate good performance and continually strive to develop their competencies (Usman, 2021).

Evaluation of professional development programs is also necessary to ensure they provide tangible benefits for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. This evaluation can be conducted by assessing changes in teacher competency after participating in the training program, including teaching skills, understanding of the material, and ability to use technology (Yusuf, 2020). Systematic evaluations enable schools to assess the effectiveness of their programs and make improvements if necessary. These evaluations are also useful for measuring the impact of professional development programs on the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) instruction in schools (Zainuddin, 2023).

Furthermore, in implementing strategies to improve Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher competency, synergy between the government, schools, and training institutions is essential. The government can provide affordable and high-quality training programs, while schools need to ensure teachers have access to these programs (Zuhdi, 2021).

Training institutions also play a role in providing relevant materials tailored to the needs of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. This synergy is expected to effectively implement ongoing professional development and produce competent and competitive Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers (Hammond, 2017).

Overall, strategies to improve Islamic Religious Education teacher competency through continuing professional development programs are crucial in facing the challenges of 21st-century education. Competent teachers will be better prepared to face the challenges of learning in the digital era and will be able to inspire students to understand and practice religious values more deeply (Patton, 2015). Therefore, continuing professional development must be a priority in education policy, particularly in the field of Islamic Religious Education (Sari, 2019).

Similarly, it is hoped that with a sustainable competency development program, Islamic Religious Education teachers can play an optimal role in shaping students' religious character and high moral integrity. A comprehensive strategy, including technology-based training, collaboration between teachers, academic supervision, and internal teacher motivation, is expected to significantly improve competency. As a result, Islamic religious education will become not only a theoretical subject but also an effective means of instilling good values rooted in Islamic teachings (Hidayati, 2020).

By implementing these various strategies, it is hoped that continuous professional development can provide a solution to address the need to improve the competency of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at various levels of education. Competent and dedicated teachers will be able to deliver quality learning and contribute to producing a generation with morals and solid religious knowledge.

Literature Review

Developing the competency of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers is a crucial aspect in improving the quality of learning and student achievement in schools. Several previous studies have emphasized that PAI teacher competency can be improved through incidental or occasional training, workshops, and seminars (Sulaiman, 2018; Fauzi, 2019). These studies generally emphasize mastery of teaching materials and methodologies, but tend to be ad hoc and do not emphasize continuity and systematic and sustainable professional development.

Unlike previous studies, the strategy for improving Islamic Religious Education teacher competency through continuous professional development (CPD) programs emphasizes a more structured and long-term approach. This program involves not only enhancing pedagogical knowledge and skills but also integrating aspects of character development, professional ethics, and adaptability to changes in the curriculum and educational technology. This approach provides teachers with space for reflection, collaboration, mentoring, and the application of best practices in daily learning, enabling comprehensive and sustainable teacher competency development (Rahman, 2020).

Furthermore, CPD enables Islamic Religious Education teachers to adapt their teaching methods to the needs of students in the digital age and address contemporary educational challenges, including technology integration, effective classroom management, and contextualized material development. This differs from conventional training approaches, which focus on a single aspect of teacher competency and are rarely followed up with consistent follow-up.

Thus, the study of strategies for improving Islamic Religious Education teacher competency through a continuing professional development program presents a new

contribution to the literature on religious education, emphasizing the importance of sustainability, integration of practices, and adaptation to the dynamics of modern education. This approach not only strengthens teachers' teaching abilities but also enhances professionalism, innovation, and the overall effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education learning, ultimately positively impacting the quality of education and the development of student character.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to describe and understand strategies for improving the competency of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers through a continuous professional development program. This approach was chosen because qualitative research is suitable for exploring complex phenomena within a specific social context, in this case, the professional development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. This approach is expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the strategies, constraints, and best practices applied in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professional development (Bogdan, 2021).

The research design used was a case study, focusing on one or more schools implementing a continuing professional development program for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. Case studies allow researchers to examine phenomena in depth within a specific, real-world context. This research was conducted in several schools meeting specific criteria, such as schools that had implemented a continuing professional development program for at least one year (Creswell, 2018).

This research was conducted at public elementary and secondary schools in specific areas that implement continuing professional development programs for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. These locations were selected because they have structured professional development programs that are considered active in supporting the improvement of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher competency (Creswell, 2018). The subjects of this study were Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, school principals, and relevant parties involved in the implementation of the continuing professional development program. Subjects were selected using purposive sampling, selecting informants based on certain criteria, such as teachers who have participated in the continuing professional development program more than once and principals who actively manage the program (Moleong, 2021).

Results and Discussion

a. Use of Technology in Teacher Training

Technology-based training has become an effective strategy for developing the competencies of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. By utilizing *e-learning* platforms, video applications, and webinars, teachers have more flexible access to relevant training materials. Technology enables teachers to learn independently and interactively, adapting their time to fit their busy schedules. For example, training through platforms like *Google Classroom* or *Zoom* allows teachers to participate in distance learning that includes the latest material on technology-based teaching strategies. This provides opportunities for teachers to integrate digital technology into their teaching, for example through creating learning videos using applications like *CapCut* or *Canva*. Teachers who were previously unfamiliar with technology become

more confident and are able to produce more innovative and engaging teaching materials.

a. Improving Pedagogical Competence through Technology

Technology -based training enhances teachers' pedagogical competence by providing tools and methods for designing student-centered learning. Technology enables interactive teaching simulations, allowing teachers to directly practice new teaching methods. For example, training using Learning Management Systems (LMS) allows teachers to learn how to utilize interactive features such as online quizzes, *discussion forums*, and *multimedia* to facilitate learning.

Islamic Religious Education teachers who participated in this training demonstrated improved skills in designing project -based learning that was more relevant to students' needs. They were also able to utilize technology to provide real -time feedback to students, resulting in more effective learning.

b. Using Social Media as a Learning Support

Technology-based training also includes utilizing social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, or TikTok to deliver learning materials. Teachers trained to create religious- based educational content through social media are able to reach students in a more engaging and engaging way that aligns with their interests. Materials like short videos on the laws of tarweed or Islamic stories can be presented in an engaging way, further motivating students to learn.

c. Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Technology- Based Training

Evaluations of technology-based training have shown a positive impact on improving teachers' professional competence. Islamic Religious Education teachers who participated in this training were able to produce technology-based learning materials of higher quality and greater relevance to students' lives. However, the success of the training depends heavily on the availability of technological resources, institutional support, and individual teachers' motivation to continue learning.

d. Challenges and Solutions in Technology -Based Training

Some challenges in implementing technology - based training include limited internet access, a lack of basic technology skills, and high workloads. Possible solutions include :

- 1) Provide initial training for basic technology skills.
- 2) Integrate technology -based training with teachers' work schedules so as not to interfere with their primary duties.
- 3) Provide incentives or certificates to encourage active teacher participation.

e. Implications for Learning Quality

The use of technology in training has been proven to significantly improve the quality of learning. Teachers skilled in using technology tend to be better able to create engaging and meaningful learning experiences. In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), this means students not only understand religious concepts but also connect them to everyday life through interactive media. With appropriately designed technology-based training strategies, the competency of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can be significantly improved, positively impacting the quality of learning and character development of students.

Conclusion

This study concludes that effective strategies for improving the competency of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers through continuing professional development programs encompass several important aspects. Technology-based training, workshops, certification, classroom observations, and collaboration within the teacher community have proven to be strategic steps for enhancing teaching skills, pedagogical abilities, and understanding the latest curriculum and learning methods.

Support from school principals, government policies, and individual teacher motivation are crucial factors in the successful implementation of this program. Furthermore, teacher involvement in communities of practice, such as Teacher Working Groups (KKG), facilitates the exchange of experiences and solutions to educational challenges. Barriers such as limited resources, time, and high workloads can be minimized through the use of technology and effective time management.

Overall, well-planned and structured strategies can improve the competency of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in facing the challenges of 21st-century education. With continuous competency development, PAI teachers are not only better prepared to integrate religious values with advances in science and technology, but also play a crucial role in shaping students with religious character and noble morals. This aligns with the research objective of identifying and analyzing effective strategies to improve the competency of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers through continuous professional development programs.

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