

Policy Gaps in the Development of Islamic Religious Education Teacher Professionalism in Aceh's Special Autonomy Context

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the development of PAI teacher professionalism in Aceh Government policies, the forms and implementation of these policies, and the challenges and solutions in strengthening PAI teacher professionalism in Aceh. This study employed a qualitative approach with a naturalistic inquiry design. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies involving policy actors and field implementers, including academics, the Aceh Education Office (Dinas Pendidikan Aceh), the Aceh Education Council (Majelis Pendidikan Aceh), the Aceh House of Representatives (DPRA), the Legal Bureau of the Aceh Government, BPSDM Aceh, PAI teacher certification institutions, PAI supervisors, teacher associations, and senior high school PAI teachers. Data were analyzed inductively and conceptually through a critical dialogue between empirical findings and public policy theories, while regulatory texts were examined using a normative-hermeneutic approach. The findings show that Aceh has a strong legal foundation through the Law on the Government of Aceh and Aceh Qanun; however, no explicit professionalism model for PAI teachers has been formulated based on Aceh's special autonomy. Policy implementation remains administrative and nationally oriented, while religious, cultural, and Islamic law dimensions are not yet systematically integrated. The study concludes that strengthening PAI teacher professionalism requires policy coordination, regulatory reform, and a substantive-religious professionalism model grounded in Aceh's special autonomy.

Keywords

Aceh Government Policy; Professionalism of Islamic Religious Education Teachers; Special Autonomy of Aceh; Implementation of Education Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of Islamic Religious Education at the elementary, secondary, and higher education levels continues to face serious challenges, particularly the low level of students' religious attitudes in both personal and social life (Endang Kartini et al., 2022; Rohman et al., 2023). Public responses to the outcomes of formal educational institutions have also not shown a positive trend (Nursobah et al., 2026). Consequently, some communities prefer madrasahs, traditional dayahs, and



integrated dayahs as alternative institutions for religious education for their families (Saifuddin, 2023; Saiful, 2021; ZA et al., 2021). This shift in preference indicates public concern about the ability of formal schools to provide substantive religious formation. Therefore, the professionalism of PAI teachers becomes a key factor, especially in integrating religious knowledge, moral guidance, and contextual Islamic values into learning and school culture.

In the context of Aceh, the regional government possesses a strong legal foundation through Law No. 44 of 1999, which grants special autonomy in the fields of religion, education, customs, and the role of ulama (Mukhlis et al., 2022). This autonomy enables independent educational governance through various institutions such as the Aceh Education Council, the Dayah Education Office, the Aceh Education Office, and the Human Resource Development Agency (BPSDM), all funded through the provincial and district budgets (APBA/APBK). However, despite substantial institutional and financial support, the quality of education in Aceh is still considered relatively low (Azhari & Jailani, 2023; Heriansyah & Fadhillah, 2024; Usman, 2021). This condition indicates that the main issue is not merely the availability of institutions and funding, but the extent to which Aceh's special autonomy has been translated into coherent, coordinated, and context-sensitive policies for developing PAI teacher professionalism.

In 2023, Aceh received a provincial budget (APBA) of more than Rp 11 trillion, with over Rp 2.7 trillion allocated to strengthen the education sector. This amount is substantial and therefore must be managed properly, transparently, and accountably. Such funding should particularly support efforts to improve educational quality, provide reading materials, and implement teacher upgrading programs (Abidin, 2019; Diana, 2023). These initiatives are especially crucial for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, who play an essential role in preparing a *shari'ah-oriented* generation in a region that formally implements Islamic law (ModusAceh, 2023). Therefore, it is necessary to examine the extent to which this large education budget has been translated into concrete professional development opportunities for PAI teachers, particularly through training, certification, competency upgrading, and other forms of sustainable professional support.

Beyond the initial recognition of Aceh's special status under Law No. 44 of 1999, Law No. 11 of 2006 on the Government of Aceh further expands the region's authority in education policy. The UUPA provides a stronger legal basis for Aceh to formulate education policies that reflect its religious, cultural, and institutional distinctiveness. This authority is also supported by the Special Autonomy Fund, which reached approximately Rp 92 trillion from 2008 to 2021 and is projected to continue until 2027. (Anggriani, 2011; Juanda Djamal, 2020) However, the availability of strong legal authority and substantial funding has not yet been fully translated into clear policy priorities for strengthening teacher professionalism, particularly for Islamic Religious Education teachers. This gap is crucial because PAI teachers play a key role in supporting the implementation of Islamic law and the substantive realization of Aceh's special autonomy (Pemerintah Aceh, 2015; Irham, 2009).

Various efforts have been undertaken by the government, including increasing education budget allocations (Butho, 2016; Mahadi & Konadi, 2022), developing school infrastructure (Samhudi et al., 2022), and organizing teacher training programs (Kurniawan et al., 2024). However, from 2013 to 2021 these initiatives did not result in significant improvements in educational quality, despite changes in political leadership. In 2013, for example, Aceh's educational performance was criticized because its National Examination graduation rate remained below that of Papua Province. Likewise, several targets outlined in the strategic plan of the Aceh Education Office were not achieved. Although 80% teacher certification was targeted, the figure had only reached 43% by 2021 (Samsuardi, 2022). This situation suggests that the challenge lies not merely in the availability of funding, infrastructure, or training programs, but in the effectiveness of policy design and implementation. Many initiatives appear to have been implemented in a fragmented and administrative manner, without a coherent strategy linking resource allocation, teacher professional development, and measurable educational outcomes. As a result, substantial investments have not been fully translated into sustainable improvements in educational

quality.

The low quality of education in Aceh has persisted for more than a decade. Empirical findings and policy documents indicate that the professional development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in Aceh has not shown significant differentiation from other regions, despite the province's special regulatory status. PAI teacher professional development continues to follow national standards without distinctive policy characteristics that reflect Aceh's special autonomy and formal implementation of Islamic law. In addition, several studies have reported that some PAI teachers still face limitations in mastering Islamic knowledge and Qur'anic literacy, while systematic improvement in these areas remains limited.

The results of the Teacher Competency Test (UKG) show that the quality of teachers in Aceh ranks among the three lowest nationally, with scores below the national average (Maharani & Yusuf A, 2023; Samsuardi, 2022). Several studies have consistently shown that the role of the Teacher Quality Development Center (PPMG) under the Aceh Education Office has been implemented procedurally but has not yet produced optimal outcomes in improving the competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers (Basri, 2019; Safitri, 2020). Although these studies focus on different aspects of teacher development, they share a common conclusion: professional development programs tend to emphasize administrative implementation rather than substantive improvement in teacher competence. This finding is particularly significant because Aceh's education policy is intended to integrate Islamic values into the educational system. However, the implementation of this policy continues to face structural challenges, including overlapping authority among institutions and the absence of a clearly formulated model of Islamic education that reflects Aceh's special autonomy. These gaps suggest that the issue extends beyond program implementation and points to a broader policy problem concerning the design and direction of PAI teacher professional development in Aceh.

Although previous studies have discussed Aceh's education policy, Islamic education, and teacher competency development, they have not specifically examined how Aceh's special autonomy is translated into a policy framework for developing the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing the policies of the Aceh Government regarding the development of PAI teacher professionalism. Specifically, the study examines how PAI teacher professional development is formulated in Aceh Government policies, how these policies are implemented in institutional practices and competency development programs, and what challenges are encountered along with the solutions designed by the government to strengthen PAI teacher professionalism in Aceh.

2. METHODS

Research Approach and Type

This study employed a qualitative approach with a naturalistic inquiry design (Charli et al., 2022) to examine the development of PAI teacher professionalism within the policy and institutional context of Aceh's special autonomy. This approach enabled the researcher to explore policy processes, institutional practices, and stakeholders' perspectives in their natural settings through inductive analysis (Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data Collection Instruments

Informants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques (Palinkas et al., 2015). The researcher served as the primary research instrument, functioning as the data collector, analyst, and interpreter. To ensure reflexivity and minimize bias, interview findings were continuously compared with policy documents and field notes, while triangulation was conducted across informants, institutions, and regulatory sources.

Data Collection Techniques

In-depth Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key policy actors and stakeholders, including academics, Islamic education practitioners, the Aceh Education Office, Aceh Education Council (MPA), DPRA Commission IV, the Legal Bureau of the Aceh Government, BPSDM, PAI teacher certification institutions, the Aceh PAI Teachers Association, and senior high school PAI teachers. The interviews explored policy formulation, implementation, challenges, and solutions related to PAI teacher professionalism.

Policy Document Analysis

The study analyzed key regulations, including Law No. 11 of 2006, Aceh Qanun No. 5 of 2008, Qanun No. 11 of 2014, Qanun No. 8 of 2014, and Qanun No. 9 of 2015. A hermeneutic–normative approach was employed (Rosidi et al., 2024). with articles, clauses, and policy mandates serving as the units of analysis. Interpretation focused on provisions concerning teacher competence, Islamic education, local content, institutional authority, and Islamic law. Additional documents included strategic education plans, teacher competency development reports, governor regulations, training guidelines, and monitoring and evaluation reports from the Aceh Education Office, BPSDM, and MPA.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using an inductive–conceptual approach to develop conceptual understanding from empirical findings (Universitas Negeri Surabaya, 2024). Interview data were processed through Miles and Huberman’s interactive model, consisting of data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion drawing (Hashimov, 2015; Saldana, 2025). Coding was conducted manually by identifying recurring themes related to policy formulation, implementation, institutional coordination, challenges, and solutions, which were then grouped into broader analytical categories (Nowell et al., 2017).. Document data were examined through content analysis and subsequently synthesized with interview findings. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation, while research ethics were maintained through informed consent, confidentiality, and the use of data solely for academic purposes.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The Development of PAI Teacher Professionalism in Aceh Government Policy

a. Regulatory Foundation

The regulatory foundation for developing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism in Aceh is relatively strong. Law No. 44 of 1999 formally recognizes Aceh’s special status in religion, education, customs, and the role of ulama in regional policy (Republik Indonesia, 1999). This recognition is expanded through Law No. 11 of 2006 concerning the Government of Aceh (UUPA), which grants the Aceh Government authority to administer quality education and incorporate local content in accordance with Islamic sharia (Law No. 11 of 2006, Article 16 paragraph (2)). Similar authority is also given to district and municipal governments (Law No. 11 of 2006, Articles 17–18), while professionalism is affirmed as one of the principles of Aceh’s governance (Law No. 11 of 2006, Article 20) (Republik Indonesia, 1999; Muis et al., 2021; UUPA, 2006).

At the regional level, Aceh Qanun No. 11 of 2014 (Qanun Aceh Nomor 11 Tahun 2014). on the Implementation of Education translates this mandate into an Islamic-oriented education system. It affirms professionalism as a foundational principle of education (Aceh Qanun No. 11 of 2014, Article 2), integrates the national education system with Aceh’s Islamic education system (Aceh Qanun No. 11 of

2014, Article 5 paragraph (2)), and obliges the government to provide religious education teachers in schools (Aceh Qanun No. 11 of 2014, Article 8 paragraph (1)). Furthermore, Aceh Qanun No. 8 of 2014 on the Principles of Islamic Sharia positions education as an instrument for implementing Islamic law Pemerintah Aceh, 2014, particularly through the internalization of aqidah, sharia, and akhlaq (Aceh Qanun No. 8 of 2014, Articles 4–6). Aceh Qanun No. 9 of 2015 (Pemerintah Aceh, 2015) further strengthens the government's authority to improve teacher competence, formulate Islamic and dayah-based curricula, and plan teacher needs and protection (Aceh Qanun No. 9 of 2015, Article 15 paragraph (1) letters e and e1; Article 19 paragraph (1) letters d and f; Article 23 paragraph (1)). Thus, Qanun 9/2015 not only contains technical regulations but also functions as a normative instrument that strengthens the position of PAI teachers as professional educators who must be systematically protected, developed, and empowered.

Analytically, these regulations show that PAI teacher professionalism in Aceh is not merely a technical issue of teacher competence, but a legal and normative mandate derived from Aceh's special autonomy and Islamic sharia identity. The regulations imply three policy directions: first, PAI teachers must meet national pedagogical standards; second, they must possess religious competence to internalize Islamic values in education; and third, they should function as agents of Islamic education within Aceh's formal school system. However, the findings also reveal a regulatory gap: although the legal basis is strong, no regulation explicitly formulates a specific model of PAI teacher professionalism based on Aceh's special autonomy. Thus, the existing regulations provide normative legitimacy, but they have not yet been translated into an operational policy framework for developing PAI teachers as a distinct professional group in Aceh.

To synthesize the findings, Figure 1 presents the relationship between Aceh's regulatory framework, its policy implications, and the expected model of PAI teacher professionalism. Rather than serving as a descriptive illustration, the figure represents an analytical interpretation of how legal mandates are translated into policy directions and professional expectations for PAI teachers within Aceh's special autonomy context.

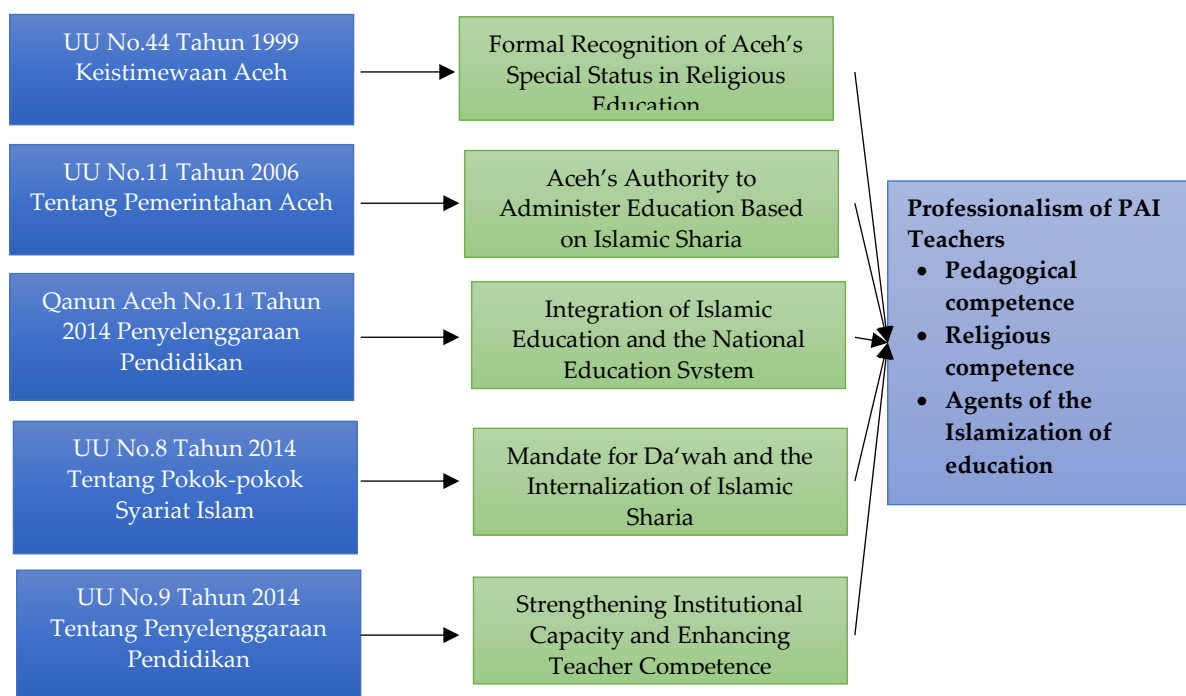


Figure 1. Flow Diagram of Regulations → Implications → Professionalism of PAI Teachers

In addition to qanun-level regulations, the normative foundation for the development of PAI teachers' professionalism in Aceh is also strengthened through Governor Regulations that govern the

technical aspects of the curriculum (Pemerintah Aceh, 2019). This provision broadens the meaning of PAI teacher professionalism, as their role is not limited to teaching religious subjects but also includes serving as strategic partners in shaping SMK graduates who are both Islamic in character and competitive.

A similar reinforcement is found in Aceh Governor Regulation No. 7 of 2022 on the Aceh Local Content Curriculum for Senior High Schools and Vocational High Schools (SMA/SMK), which mandates the implementation of a curriculum grounded in Acehnese identity and Islamic values across all secondary education institutions. This regulation affirms that local content reflecting Sharia values and Acehnese culture must be integrated into the learning process (Pemerintah Aceh, 2022). Normatively, this positions PAI teachers not only as subject instructors but also as agents responsible for integrating Islamic and Acehnese values across interdisciplinary curricula. The regulatory analysis reveals several interrelated policy dimensions that shape the development of PAI teacher professionalism in Aceh. These dimensions are synthesized in Table 1.

Table 1. Key Policy Aspects in the Development of PAI Teacher Professionalism in Aceh

No	Policy Aspect	Policy Substance	Main Regulatory Basis
1	Pedagogical and religious competence	Strengthening PAI teachers' pedagogical capacity while integrating <i>aqidah</i> , <i>shari'ah</i> , <i>akhlaq</i> , and Acehnese Islamic values into learning	UUPA Article 16(2); Aceh Qanun No. 11/2014 Articles 2 and 5(2); Aceh Qanun No. 8/2014 Articles 4-6
2	Islamic curriculum and local content	Involving PAI teachers in developing and implementing Islamic-based local content and Acehnese cultural values in schools	Aceh Qanun No. 11/2014 Article 22(f); Aceh Qanun No. 9/2015 Article 19(1)(d)(f); Aceh Governor Regulation No. 7/2022
3	Career development and institutional synergy	Supporting certification, training, career development, and coordination among the Aceh Education Office, MPA, BPSDM, certification institutions, and ulama	Aceh Qanun No. 9/2015 Articles 15(1)(e)(e1) and 23(1); Law No. 44/1999 Article 9; UUPA Article 20
4	Financing, monitoring, and evaluation	Optimizing special autonomy funds and establishing supervision and evaluation aligned with Aceh's special autonomy mandate	Law No. 44/1999 Article 10; UUPA Article 20; Aceh Qanun No. 9/2015
5	Policy implication	PAI teacher professionalism should be developed not only through national standards but also through Aceh-specific religious, cultural, institutional, and legal mandates	Synthesis of UUPA, Aceh Qanun, and Governor Regulations

The regulatory aspect of education in Aceh indicates that although a legal foundation for special autonomy has been established through the Law on the Governance of Aceh (UUPA) and various *qanun*, there is still no specific regulation that explicitly governs the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. The Head of the Legal Bureau of the Aceh Regional Secretariat emphasized that existing regulations remain general in nature and have not yet provided specific provisions concerning PAI teachers. According to him, this condition represents a policy gap that needs to be addressed through the formulation of a specific *qanun* or governor regulation, accompanied by derivative instruments such as circular letters and governor instructions. He further stressed that PAI teachers cannot be entirely equated with teachers of general subjects because they carry normative and socio-religious mandates directly related to the implementation of Islamic law.

A similar view was expressed by the Vice Chairperson of Commission VI of the Aceh Regional House of Representatives (DPRA), which oversees the education sector. Normatively, Aceh as a region implementing Islamic law should have more specific policies concerning Islamic Religious Education

(PAI) teachers. However, up to the present, no particular regulation has been identified that explicitly governs the mechanism for the professional development of PAI teachers. Consequently, the treatment of PAI teachers in Aceh remains general in nature, without policy differentiation in terms of qualification improvement, strengthening of religious competencies, or the design of professionalism based on Acehese characteristics

These findings indicate that although structural awareness of the urgency to strengthen the role of PAI teachers already exists, the prevailing policies still operate within a general regulatory framework and have not yet been translated into legal instruments that explicitly affirm the distinctiveness and strategic position of PAI teachers within the Aceh education system.

b. The Role of Institutions in Regulation

The development of the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in Aceh involves various institutions whose authority is grounded in statutory laws and qanun. In terms of policy, the Aceh Government and the Aceh Regional House of Representatives (DPRA) have begun to give attention to strengthening the professionalism of PAI teachers, including plans to incorporate this issue into the revision of the Qanun on Education Administration, which is projected to be included in the 2025 Priority Aceh Legislative Program.

From the planning perspective, the issue of developing PAI teachers has the potential to be integrated into Aceh's long-term and medium-term development planning documents, namely the Regional Long-Term Development Plan (RPJP) and the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJM). It is also related to the allocation of the education budget, which must reach at least 20 percent of the Aceh Regional Budget (APBA). In this regard, the Legal Bureau plays a role in drafting regulatory frameworks, while the technical aspects of implementation fall under the authority of the Education Office.

From a legislative standpoint, the relationship between the Aceh Regional House of Representatives (Commission VI) and the executive branch in the education sector is considered to function well. However, there has never been a specific discussion regarding policies on the professionalism of PAI teachers. Although the aspirations of PAI teachers have been conveyed, they have not yet been formulated into a specific policy framework. In the future, a conceptual initiative from educational institutions is needed to formulate a model for enhancing the capacity of PAI teachers that can later be legalized through regional legislative mechanisms.

The Aceh Education Council (MPA) holds a strategic position as an independent institution providing policy considerations in the education sector, with a historical legal basis in Law No. 44 of 1999 Article 9 and further technical reinforcement through Aceh Governor Regulation No. 31 of 2023. This role indicates that the professionalism of PAI teachers also carries ulama-based legitimacy within the framework of Aceh's special autonomy.

The Aceh Education Office plays a technical role in implementing the Islamic curriculum and local content, as stipulated in Aceh Qanun No. 11 of 2014 Article 22 letter f, which is further strengthened by Aceh Governor Regulation No. 7 of 2022 and Aceh Governor Regulation No. 66 of 2019. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Religious Affairs retains national authority in the supervision and development of PAI teachers, coordinated with the Aceh Government as emphasized in Aceh Qanun No. 9 of 2015 Article 23 paragraph (1).

Beyond formal institutions, *dayah* (Islamic boarding schools), universities, the Aceh Ulama Consultative Assembly (MPU), teacher associations, and district/city governments also contribute to the development of PAI teachers. This aligns with Aceh Qanun No. 8 of 2014 Article 5 paragraph (1) letter b, which affirms that the implementation of Islamic law is carried out through education and *da'wah*. Thus, the professionalism of PAI teachers in Aceh operates within a collaborative multi-actor ecosystem that requires strong regulatory and institutional synergy

c. Direction and Objectives of the Professional Development of PAI Teachers

Normatively, the direction of professional development for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in Aceh is grounded in the principles of Islamic values and professionalism as stipulated in Law No. 11 of 2006 concerning the Governance of Aceh, Article 20, which outlines the principles of Islamic orientation, professionalism, accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency. These principles are reinforced in Aceh Qanun No. 11 of 2014 Article 2, which places professionalism as a fundamental principle in the administration of education. Accordingly, the development of PAI teachers is directed not only toward strengthening pedagogical capacity but also toward integrating the values of Islamic law into educational practice.

From the perspective of objectives, the regulatory framework points to three main targets. First, enhancing pedagogical competence so that PAI learning meets national education standards while remaining responsive to local contexts. Second, strengthening religious competence to internalize the values of *aqidah*, *shari'ah*, and *akhlak*, as emphasized in Aceh Qanun No. 8 of 2014 Articles 4–6. Third, affirming the role of PAI teachers as agents of the Islamization of education who integrate Islamic values, Acehnese identity, and national principles within the education system, as stated in Aceh Qanun No. 9 of 2015 Article 19 paragraph (1) letters d and f.

Analytically, this direction and these objectives indicate that the professionalism of PAI teachers in Aceh is not merely understood as a set of technical competencies but as a normative and cultural mandate rooted in Aceh's special autonomy. PAI teachers are positioned as strategic agents in preserving and internalizing Islamic law through formal education; therefore, their professional development must encompass both pedagogical and religious dimensions in an integrated manner.

Forms and Implementation of the Aceh Government's Policy in the Development of PAI Teacher Professionalism

The implementation of policies for the professional development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in Aceh represents the operational translation of the normative mandates contained in the UUPA, qanun, and governor regulations. These policies are reflected in several programs, including PPG and certification, postgraduate education, training and workshops, the Guru Penggerak program, supervision by PAI supervisors, MGMP and professional associations, and Islamic-based curriculum integration. However, the findings indicate that implementation remains largely administrative, fragmented, and not yet fully integrated with Aceh's special status as a region implementing Islamic law.

The PPG program has become the most dominant instrument of professional development. Between 2023 and 2024, there were 663 participants, and by 2025 approximately 96% of PAI teachers had obtained certification. However, this achievement still follows the national scheme and has not been designed through an Aceh-specific affirmative framework. Disparities among districts and municipalities, dual authority between local government and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the absence of specific derivative regulations indicate that certification has not yet produced a fully systemic and sustainable model of PAI teacher professionalism.

Other development programs also show limited integration and reach. Postgraduate education is available through the general BPSDM scheme, but there is no affirmative program specifically for PAI teachers; only around 3.21% of PAI teachers hold postgraduate degrees, consisting of 327 master's graduates and 3 doctoral graduates. Pedagogical innovation through LPTK, such as microteaching, digital literacy, and educational technology, has contributed to teacher capacity, yet competency training facilitated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2024–2025 reached only 7.20% of teachers in 2024 and 3.50% in 2025. Similarly, the Guru Penggerak program provides equal access for PAI teachers, but its orientation remains national and has not explicitly integrated Aceh's Islamic legal distinctiveness.

The roles of supervision, MGMP, and AGPAII have become important in filling existing policy

gaps. Supervisory evaluations show that many PAI teachers receive the category of "Very Good," yet the instruments still rely on general national standards and do not measure contributions to local Islamic values. Meanwhile, MGMP and AGPAII function as platforms for digital literacy, certification advocacy, and Islamic curriculum discussion, although their activities depend largely on teachers' collective initiatives due to limited budgetary support. These findings reinforce that PAI teacher development in Aceh still emphasizes certification and administrative compliance, while spiritual formation, character building, and the depth of Islamic scholarship have not yet become central elements of policy design. The research findings are summarized in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Forms and Implementation of Policies for the Development of PAI Teacher Professionalism in Aceh

No	Development Domain	Policy/Instrument Basis	Implementation Pattern in Practice	Meaning of the Findings
1	PPG, certification, and professional allowance	Law No. 14/2005; National PPG and teacher certification policies	PPG programs in 2023–2024 involved ±663 participants, supported by APBA, Baitul Mal, LPTK, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs; certification also affects professional allowances	PPG is the main instrument, but professionalism tends to be understood as administrative legitimacy and welfare fulfillment, not yet as an Aceh-specific professionalism model
2	Postgraduate education and pedagogical competence	Aceh BPSDM policy; role of LPTK/Faculty of Tarbiyah	Postgraduate opportunities are available but without affirmative schemes for PAI teachers; LPTK contributes through microteaching, digital literacy, and teaching simulations	Academic and pedagogical development exists, but remains individual and has not been institutionalized as a structured regional policy
3	Guru Penggerak and academic supervision	National Guru Penggerak program; national supervision instruments	PAI teachers have equal access to Guru Penggerak; supervision is conducted across levels by supervisors	Development and evaluation remain generic, with no differentiation for the religious role of PAI teachers or sharia and Acehese dimensions
4	Professional organizations, MGMP, and Islamic value integration	AGPAII, MGMP, and Governor Regulation No. 7 of 2022	MGMP and AGPAII conduct independent training, advocacy, and literacy strengthening; PAI teachers serve as facilitators in local content and value integration	Professional communities expand the strategic role of PAI teachers, but activities depend on teacher initiatives and lack integrated policy and funding support
5	Institutional governance and coordination	Local Government, Ministry of Religious Affairs, LPTK	Collaboration exists in funding and programs	Dual authority and fragmented coordination create obstacles to policy continuity and sustainability

Challenges and Solutions of the Aceh Government in Developing the Professionalism of PAI Teachers

The main challenge in developing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism in Aceh lies in the absence of specific derivative regulations that translate Aceh's special autonomy into technical and operational policies for PAI teachers. Although Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers and Law No. 11 of 2006 on the Government of Aceh provide general legal foundations, they have not yet produced a differentiated policy framework based on Islamic law and Acehese

characteristics. Consequently, professional development programs such as PPG, Guru Penggerak, and postgraduate education continue to follow national patterns without explicit affirmation of PAI teachers' distinct religious and cultural roles.

The second challenge concerns fragmented implementation, weak evaluation, and limited institutional coordination. Although funding for PPG and access to training have been provided, some PAI teachers remain unreached, and program distribution remains uneven across regions. Postgraduate education has not been designed as an affirmative scheme for PAI teachers, while the strategic contribution of PAI teachers within the Guru Penggerak program has not been specifically measured. Existing evaluation instruments also remain general and do not assess the impact of policies on PAI learning quality, student character formation, or the internalization of Islamic values. Moreover, coordination among the Aceh Education Office, BPSDM, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, MPU, and LPTKs still operates sectorally, so PAI teacher development has not yet become a unified policy agenda.

The proposed solutions include strengthening operational and contextual derivative regulations, either through qanun or governor regulations, that explicitly define the religious and pedagogical competency standards of PAI teachers in Aceh. These regulations should be followed by the integration of PAI teacher development into the Aceh Education Strategic Plan, the design of training curricula that combine pedagogical and religious competencies, the strengthening of MGMP and professional forums as sustainable learning communities, and the establishment of a data-based monitoring and evaluation system. Funding can be optimized through APBA, APBK, special autonomy funds, and legitimate religious funding sources with clear accountability mechanisms. Through this integrated approach, the development of PAI teacher professionalism in Aceh can move beyond administrative compliance and reflect the normative mandate of Aceh as a region implementing Islamic law.

Discussion

Publik Policy Development for PAI Teachers in the Perspective of Public Policy Theory

The research findings indicate that the policy for developing PAI teachers in Aceh has formally been implemented through national programs such as PPG, the Guru Penggerak program, and access to advanced studies. However, substantively these policies still operate within a general framework and have not yet been designed as differentiated policies that reflect the special status of Aceh as a region implementing Islamic law. From the perspective of Merilee S. Grindle (Grindle & Merilee S., 1998) the problem lies in the dimension of *content of policy*, which has not explicitly defined PAI teachers as a target group with specific needs, as well as in the *context of implementation*, which shows the presence of a dual authority structure between the Aceh Government and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This situation limits the policy's capacity to effectively promote a contextual and distinctive form of professionalism among PAI teacher.

When analyzed through David Easton's policy system model (Anderson, 1953), it becomes evident that normative inputs in the form of the UUPA and education qanuns have not yet fully generated specific operational policy outputs. The feedback mechanism has also not been strongly developed, as existing evaluations remain general and do not specifically measure the impact of policies on the quality of PAI learning or on the internalization of Sharia values. Meanwhile, within the framework of the *Advocacy Coalition Framework* developed by Paul A. Sabatier (P. Sabatier, 2019), a coalition of actors with a solid belief system regarding the importance of professionalism among PAI teachers based on regional distinctiveness has not yet emerged (Yuliah, 2020). As a result, existing policies tend to remain administrative in nature and have not yet addressed the ideological and normative dimensions that form the foundation of Aceh's special status.

Table 3. Policy Analysis of the Development of PAI Teacher Professionalism in the Perspective of Public Policy Theory

Empirical Findings	Theoretical Perspective	Analysis	Implications
Teacher development programs remain general in nature	Merilee S. Grindle – Content of Policy	– PAI teachers have not yet been defined as a specific policy target group	A special policy framework for PAI teachers based on Aceh's special autonomy is required
Training participation only 10.7%	Merilee S. Grindle – Implementability	– Policy implementation has not yet reached an optimal level	Expansion of access and stronger resource support are needed
Dual authority between Aceh Government and Ministry of Religious Affairs	Merilee S. Grindle – Context of Implementation	– Bureaucratic structure of constrains policy effectiveness	Institutional integration of authority is necessary
Limited training outputs	David Easton – Output-Feedback	– The policy system has not yet become adaptive	A feedback-based evaluation system is required
Policy actor coalition has not yet formed	Paul A. Sabatier – Advocacy Coalition	– There is no shared belief system among policy actors	Strengthening a policy coalition is necessary
Professionalism remains technocratic	Eric Hoyle – Professionalism	– Teachers have not yet developed contextual autonomy	A redefinition of PAI teacher professionalism is needed

Professionalism of PAI Teachers in the Perspective of Professionalism Theory

Empirically, the professionalism of PAI teachers has improved in its formal dimension, particularly through certification and competency development programs. However, this improvement largely reflects what Eric Hoyle (Hoyle, 1995) describes as *restricted professionalism*, namely a form of professionalism grounded primarily in administrative compliance and technical standards rather than in reflective autonomy and broader moral orientation.

From the perspective of Harold L. Wilensky (1964), a profession is characterized by social legitimacy, competency standards, and public recognition. PAI teachers in Aceh have indeed obtained formal legitimacy as a professional group, yet they have not received specific recognition for their religious mandate as carriers of Islamic values within formal education. This situation indicates a reduction of the meaning of professionalism to merely fulfilling administrative indicators, without systematically integrating spiritual and moral dimensions (Amirul Haq, 2022; Giantara & Amiliya, 2021). This condition is also acknowledged by researchers in Aceh, who note that significant challenges remain in developing the education sector despite the region's special autonomy, which in fact offers opportunities to formulate distinctive policy frameworks (Atqia et al., 2024; Muis et al., 2021; Mukhlis et al., 2022).

This study identifies that, normatively, PAI teachers in Aceh carry a mandate that goes beyond purely pedagogical functions. Their professionalism contains an axiological dimension rooted in the values of sincerity (*ikhlas*) (Rahman et al., 2023) (Hidayah et al., 2023;), transcendental responsibility (*muraqabatullah*), and moral cultivation (*akhlaq*) (Basuki, 2024; Soleha et al., 2024). However, these dimensions have not yet been institutionalized within the systems of evaluation and career development, resulting in their manifestation remaining largely personal rather than structural.

Distinction of Professionalism Indicators for PAI Teachers

The analysis indicates that the indicators of professionalism for PAI teachers in Aceh cannot be reduced solely to pedagogical competence. Pedagogical competence remains essential, as emphasized in Shulman's theory of *Pedagogical Content Knowledge* (Almeida et al., 2019; Shulman, 1987). However, in the context of Aceh, it must be integrated with substantive religious competence and broader socio-religious roles.

Regional regulations, such as qanun on the administration of education and Islamic education, provide direction that PAI teachers function as agents of integrating the values of *aqidah*, *sharia*, and *akhlaq* within the educational system. Therefore, the professionalism of PAI teachers is multidimensional, encompassing pedagogical, religious, ethical-moral, social, and cultural dimensions. The socio-cultural dimension becomes a significant distinction, as PAI teachers are expected to play a role in preserving Acehnese identity while simultaneously strengthening national values within the framework of Islamic teachings.

Aceh's Distinctiveness as a Critique of General Professionalism Theory

Modern professionalism theories generally develop within a secular and administrative framework. They emphasize professional autonomy, competency standards, and state recognition, but do not explicitly incorporate religious mandates as a structural element of the profession. In the Aceh context, such an approach proves inadequate.

PAI teachers in Aceh occupy a unique position: they are educators within the national system while simultaneously serving as normative actors in the implementation of *Syariat Islam*. This dual mandate creates the need for a model of professionalism that diverges from conventional frameworks. When policies rely solely on national parameters without differentiation, a gap emerges between the normative mandate and the professional design actually applied.

Based on the theoretical and regulatory analysis, PAI teacher professionalism in Aceh requires indicators that go beyond general pedagogical standards. These indicators include contextual pedagogical competence, substantive religious competence, ethical-moral integrity, socio-cultural awareness, and continuous professional development. This formulation also critiques general professionalism theories, which tend to emphasize certification, technical competence, and state recognition, while overlooking the religious mandate, ulama-based legitimacy, and Islamic identity embedded in Aceh's education system.

Synthesis and Conceptual Contribution

This discussion points to a key synthetic finding: a policy–profession gap exists, reflecting the distance between Aceh's normative regulations—which emphasize the region's Islamic identity—and the professional development policies for PAI teachers, which remain general. This paradox indicates that regional autonomy has not yet been fully translated into substantive policies for PAI teachers.

The conceptual contribution of this study lies in formulating a model of PAI teacher professionalism grounded in Aceh's distinctiveness. The model integrates four main dimensions: national pedagogical standards, substantive religious competence, socio-religious roles, and local legal legitimacy.

- a. **Pedagogical Standards:** PAI teachers are required to meet national pedagogical standards—including pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies—ensuring that Aceh's distinctiveness is not viewed as separate from the national education framework.
- b. **Substantive Religious Competence:** Professionalism demands deep religious understanding, internalization of *tauhid*, ethics, and Sharia values, beyond mere mastery of teaching materials. This dimension positions the PAI teacher as both a moral educator and a spiritual mentor.
- c. **Socio-Religious Role:** PAI teachers function as agents of social-religious transformation,

contributing to character formation, strengthening religious moderation, and internalizing Islamic values within schools and communities. Their role extends beyond instructional duties into broader societal impact.

- d. Legal Legitimacy: Professionalism is legitimized through regional legal frameworks—UUPA, educational qanuns, and Sharia regulations—ensuring that their status and responsibilities are not merely moral obligations but structural mandates facilitated and developed by the regional government.

The formulation of this model arises from the convergence of three layers of analysis: empirical evidence on the implementation of PAI teacher development policies, normative interpretation of Aceh's special autonomy regulations, and theoretical reflection on the limitations of administrative professionalism. These three layers indicate that PAI teacher professionalism in Aceh cannot be adequately understood only through certification, workload fulfillment, or general pedagogical standards. Instead, it requires a broader framework that recognizes religious competence, socio-religious responsibility, and regional legal legitimacy as integral elements of the profession. Therefore, the model redefines the professional identity of PAI teachers from an administrative paradigm to an integrative professionalism paradigm, in which religious and socio-religious competencies are positioned as core elements alongside national pedagogical standards.

Table 4. From Administrative Professionalism to Substantive-Religious Professionalism

Dimension	Administrative/General Professionalism	Substantive-Religious Professionalism (Novelty)
Primary Focus	Fulfillment of workload (24 hours), formal certification, and completion of the national curriculum.	Internalization of <i>tauhid</i> values, moral character formation, and implementation of the <i>Liya'budun</i> philosophy.
Teacher Status	Viewed as a subject-specific religious teacher isolated within one subject.	Transforms into a "Value Infrastructure" and integrator of religion across all general subjects.
Performance Indicators	Based on secular standards (pedagogical, professional, social, personal) that are general.	Incorporates Substantive Religious Competence and socio-religious roles as formal performance indicators.
Authority Base	Dependent on central/national technical guidelines without regional specificity.	Grounded in Regional Legal Legitimacy (UUPA & Qanun) as a binding structural mandate.
Ultimate Goal	Achieving academic scores and administrative career milestones (promotion/certification).	Realizing social transformation of Acehnese society in accordance with Islamic principles through formal education.

Table 4 demonstrates the transformation proposed by this study from an administrative conception of professionalism toward a substantive-religious model. The comparison highlights that the distinctive feature of PAI teacher professionalism in Aceh lies not only in pedagogical competence, but also in the integration of religious authority, socio-religious responsibility, and regional legal legitimacy. This shift reflects the need to align teacher professional development policies with the normative mandate of Aceh's special autonomy and Islamic educational vision.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism in Aceh is marked by a *policy-profession gap*. Although Aceh has a strong legal foundation through the UUPA and education qanuns, this authority has not been translated into a

specific policy framework for PAI teacher professionalism. Consequently, PAI teachers remain positioned within a general administrative-professional framework rather than as a distinct professional group shaped by Aceh's special autonomy and Islamic law.

Policy implementation also remains administrative and fragmented. Existing programs have supported certification, training, and teacher capacity development, but they have not formed a sustainable roadmap integrating Aceh-specific religious, cultural, and legal dimensions. This condition produces restricted religious professionalism, in which PAI teachers are formally recognized as professionals, while their substantive religious roles, moral leadership, and function as guardians of Acehese Islamic identity remain institutionally unmeasured and insufficiently supported.

The main contribution of this study is the Substantive-Religious Professionalism Model, which shifts PAI teacher professionalism from administrative compliance toward an integrative framework combining national pedagogical standards, religious competence, socio-religious responsibility, and regional legal legitimacy. Theoretically, this model extends conventional professionalism theory by introducing structural-religious legitimacy as a core variable in special autonomy contexts. Practically, it requires differentiated professional standards, stronger MGMP and LPTK roles, and evaluation instruments that measure Islamic value internalization and student character formation. From a policy perspective, the Aceh Government needs to synchronize derivative regulations, integrate PAI teacher development into regional planning, and institutionalize a sustainable roadmap for PAI teachers as strategic actors in Islamic education.

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