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HOLISTIC COMPETENCIES OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS TEACHERS AND THEIR IMPACT ON STUDENT UNDERSTANDING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract	This study explores the significance of Islamic Religious Education teachers' competencies in enhancing students' understanding of religious values and shaping their character. Focusing on the pedagogical, professional, personal, and social aspects, the study investigates how these competencies directly affect students' comprehension of Islamic teachings. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design, this research was conducted at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman in Indonesia. The data in this study were obtained from various sources, including primary data from classroom observation, interviews and document analusis, while secondary data were gathered from literature references and school academic reports. Data collection was conducted through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and students and analysis of relevant documents. The data analysis technique employed thematic analysis, following the steps of data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman. The findings demonstrate that teachers' holistic competencies play a crucial role in improving students' understanding of religious concepts, while also fostering moral development. The study contributes to the literature on the transformation of Islamic education, offering insights into how teacher competencies shape students' educational experiences. Furthermore, it provides recommendations for educational institutions to focus on teacher development to address the challenges of the digital era while maintaining the quality of Islamic education.character and strengthening Islamic education as a whole.
Keywords	Islamic Religious Education (IRE), Teacher Competency, Holistic Competencies, Secondary School Education.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) holds significant importance in shaping students' moral, spiritual, and intellectual development (Jamil, 2020). In Indonesia, a country characterized by its cultural and religious diversity, IRE plays a pivotal role in fostering tolerance, strengthening communal values, and instilling upright moral conduct in young learners (Dalimunthe, 2023). As a core part of the national curriculum, IRE not only seeks to transmit religious knowledge but also aims to nurture students' character and behavior in alignment with Islamic teachings (Mutawalli et al., 2024). The quality of IRE, therefore, is heavily influenced by the competence of Islamic religious teachers, who are tasked with delivering these critical values in the classroom.

Teachers' competencies are widely recognized as a key determinant of educational success. In the context of IRE, these competencies are not limited to knowledge of the subject matter but also encompass pedagogical, professional, personal, and social aspects that influence their ability to engage and educate students effectively (Hawi, 2013; Syamsuri, 2021). A holistic approach to teacher competence, integrating all four dimensions, can enhance students' understanding of Islamic teachings and contribute to their character development (Solecha & Sumarna, 2023). However, while the importance of teacher competence is well acknowledged, there is a significant gap in research that holistically examines how these competencies collectively impact students' learning outcomes in IRE.

Holistic Competence of Islamic Religious Teachers and Its Impact on Students' Understanding at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman The level of pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competence of Islamic religious teachers at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman is a crucial aspect in determining the effectiveness of learning. Based on observational data and interviews with the principal and teachers, most educators possess adequate pedagogical competence, utilizing diverse teaching methods such as interactive lectures, discussions, and technology-based approaches. Teachers' professional competence is also evident in their deep understanding of Islamic teachings, although some still need improvement in mastering the latest curriculum. In terms of social competence, teachers are able to build harmonious relationships with students and the school environment, while personal competence is reflected in their exemplary conduct in daily life.

The holistic competence of teachers plays a vital role in enhancing students' understanding of Islamic religious subjects. A case study conducted on tenth-grade students showed that those taught by highly competent teachers tend to have a better grasp of Islamic concepts compared to those taught by teachers with developing competencies. Additionally, a more personal and communicative approach by teachers contributes to creating a conducive learning atmosphere. Interviews with several students revealed that they are more enthusiastic about learning when teachers can explain the material in an engaging and relevant manner to their daily lives.

MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman has implemented various policies to improve the competence of Islamic religious teachers. The school regularly organizes training sessions and workshops in collaboration with educational institutions and religious organizations. Moreover, certification programs and competence enhancement through academic supervision are also applied to ensure that teachers continuously develop their professionalism. Regular evaluations of teaching methods and feedback from students and parents are also part of the school's strategy to improve the effectiveness of Islamic education. With these policies in place, the quality of IRE teaching is expected to continue improving, providing a significant positive impact on students' understanding of Islamic teachings in depth.

Despite existing studies on teacher competencies in Indonesia, much of the literature has focused on isolated aspects, such as pedagogical skills or professional qualifications (S. Setiawan et al., 2023). For example, research by Romi Lie research examines the role of religious teachers in fostering religious moderation in both public and private schools in Bogor. The study results indicate that religious teachers serve as agents of change in instilling moderation values in students through inclusive teaching approaches and methods. Teachers play a crucial role in cultivating a moderate understanding of religious teachings, encouraging interfaith dialogue, and creating a tolerant learning environment (Lie, 2024). Furthermore, the study conducted by Solecha & Sumarna analyzes the impact of teacher competence and school culture on students' learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education at elementary schools in Cantigi District, Indramayu Regency. The findings reveal that teacher competence directly influences student learning outcomes, with a correlation coefficient of 0.747, where the contribution of teacher competence to student learning outcomes reaches 55.9%. This indicates that teacher competence is a key factor in improving the quality of education (Solecha & Sumarna, 2023).

Research by Mutawalli et al. discusses the pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers at SMP Nurul Hadina Patumbak. This research focuses on teachers' understanding and implementation of pedagogical competence in lesson planning, learning assessment, and the use of technology in teaching. The results indicate that teachers' pedagogical competence in learning evaluation is categorized as good, with an average score of 83, but there is still a need for improvement in utilizing educational technology (Mutawalli et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, the study by Silvester et al. highlights the competency of elementary school teachers in implementing digital-based learning. The findings reveal a gap between digital competency demands and teachers' actual abilities in the field. Teachers face challenges in creating digital learning media and effectively utilizing digital tools and applications in the learning process (Silvester et al., 2023). Lastly, the research by Simamora et al. emphasizes the importance of teacher competence in achieving students' learning objectives. The study confirms that high teacher competence contributes to learning effectiveness, academic achievement, and students' character development (Simamora et al., 2023). This research also explains that academic qualifications and teacher professionalism, in accordance with Law No. 14 of 2005, are determining factors for educational success.

From the five previous studies, several research gaps can be identified. The study highlights religious moderation but does not specifically discuss the relationship between teacher competence and students' understanding of religious subjects (Lie, 2024). Solecha & Sumarna's research emphasizes the connection between teacher competence and school culture in influencing student learning outcomes but does not specifically address teacher competence in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) instruction (Solecha & Sumarna, 2023). Mutawalli et al. have examined the pedagogical competence of IRE teachers, but their study primarily focuses on teaching implementation without deeply exploring its connection to students' comprehension (Mutawalli et al., 2024). Silvester et al. places greater emphasis on the digital competence (Silvester et al., 2023), whereas S focuses on the general impact of teacher competence on learning objectives without specifically discussing the competence of Islamic religious teachers.

The novelty of this research lies in its in-depth analysis of how the specific competencies of Islamic religious teachers influence students' understanding of religious subjects. Beyond highlighting pedagogical aspects, this study also considers psychological, social, and methodological factors in the learning process. Consequently, this research contributes to expanding

knowledge on the role of Islamic religious teachers in enhancing students' comprehension while providing strategic recommendations to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education in schools.

In Indonesia, the challenges faced by Islamic religious teachers are manifold. Many teachers are underprepared due to insufficient training, and a significant number lack advanced qualifications in Islamic studies, which limits their ability to deliver deep and meaningful lessons (Akbar Maulana & Suprapto, 2024; Karlen et al., 2023). Furthermore, the rapid advancement of technology and shifting societal values create additional pressures for teachers to adapt and innovate in their teaching practices (Silvester et al., 2023). These challenges not only affect the quality of education but also hinder students' ability to fully engage with and comprehend religious teachings (Maulidya & Ulfah, 2023; Yoshimoto, 2023). This situation underscores the critical need for teacher professional development programs that address these multifaceted competencies.

Mulyasa emphasizes that teacher competence is a fundamental factor in determining the success of education. According to his framework, a teacher must possess four key competencies: pedagogical, professional, social, and personal. Pedagogical competence refers to a teacher's ability to manage learning effectively, including planning lessons, implementing various teaching methods, and evaluating student progress. Professional competence relates to mastery of subject matter, ensuring that teachers have in-depth knowledge of Islamic teachings. Social competence highlights the importance of teachers' ability to communicate and interact constructively with students, colleagues, and the broader community. Lastly, personal competence reflects a teacher's ethical and moral integrity, serving as a role model for students. Without these holistic competencies, teachers may struggle to provide an engaging and meaningful educational experience (Mulyasa, 2010). Furthermore, Lev Vygotsky's learning theory provides additional insights into the role of teacher competence in enhancing students' comprehension. Vygotsky argues that learning is a social process where students develop understanding through interaction with more knowledgeable individuals, including teachers. His concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) highlights the gap between what students can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with the guidance of a skilled teacher. In the context of Islamic religious education, this means that teachers must not only deliver information but also scaffold students' learning through interactive discussions, critical thinking exercises, and contextual applications of religious principles. By integrating Vygotsky's approach, Islamic religious teachers can create a dynamic and

supportive learning environment that fosters deeper student engagement and comprehension (W. Setiawan, 2024)

Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory also offers valuable insights into effective teaching practices. Piaget posits that students progress through different stages of cognitive development, from the concrete operational stage to the formal operational stage. This suggests that Islamic religious teachers should adapt their teaching strategies based on students' cognitive abilities. Younger students may require more concrete examples and hands-on activities, while older students benefit from abstract reasoning and critical discussions. By aligning instructional methods with cognitive development stages, teachers can facilitate a more effective learning process that enhances students' understanding of religious teachings (Piaget, 2019).

Additionally, McCharthy emphasizes the importance of differentiated instruction in addressing students' diverse learning needs. Differentiation involves tailoring teaching methods, content, and assessment strategies to accommodate different learning styles and abilities. In Islamic religious education, this approach ensures that all students, regardless of their prior knowledge and cognitive capacity, receive instruction that is meaningful and accessible. For example, teachers can integrate visual aids, storytelling, group discussions, and hands-on activities to engage students with varying learning preferences. This aligns with Piaget's perspective on cognitive development, as differentiation enables students to process information at their own developmental level while still being challenged to grow academically and spiritually (Roberts, 2019). By incorporating the principles of Vygotsky, Piaget, and McCarthy, Islamic religious teachers can enhance their pedagogical approaches and create an inclusive, student-centered learning environment. This, in turn, contributes to the development of students' deeper understanding and appreciation of Islamic teachings, preparing them to navigate the complexities of contemporary society with a strong moral foundation.

The purpose of this study is to conduct an in-depth analysis of how the holistic competence of Islamic religious teachers—including pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies—contributes to students' understanding of Islamic religious education. Additionally, this study aims to identify the challenges teachers face in implementing these competencies and explore school policies that enhance the quality of Islamic education. Theoretically, this study contributes to the existing literature on the transformation of Islamic education by highlighting the strategic role of Islamic religious teachers' competencies in improving students' understanding. It

also expands the discussion on Mulyasa's theory of teacher competence, which emphasizes that pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies are essential factors in effective teaching. Furthermore, this study adopts the perspective of Lev Vygotsky's learning theory, which stresses that social interaction and guidance from competent teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' understanding through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Pragmatically, the findings of this study can serve as an evaluation tool and provide recommendations for Islamic educational institutions, particularly MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman, to enhance teacher competencies through training, academic supervision, and the development of competency-based curricula. Thus, this research not only contributes academically but also offers practical solutions to improve the effectiveness of Islamic religious education at the secondary school level.

METHOD

Type of Research This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study method (Creswell, 2018). The study aims to explain the Holistic Competence of Islamic Religious Teachers and Its Impact on Students' Understanding at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman. The data used in this study includes various information regarding the Holistic Competence of Islamic Religious Teachers and Its Impact on Students' Understanding at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman. The data is obtained from various informants relevant to the research needs.

Data Collection Techniques Data collection is conducted using three main methods. First, In-depth Interviews are semi-structured interviews conducted with Islamic religious teachers, students, and the school principal. These interviews aim to explore teachers' perceptions of their competencies and how these competencies influence students' understanding. Students are also asked to share their experiences related to the teaching provided by teachers. Second, Participatory Observation, where observations are carried out both inside and outside the classroom to examine teaching strategies, classroom management, student engagement, and teacher-student interactions. Third, Documentation, where document analysis is conducted on teacher certifications, lesson plans, syllabi, students' academic records, and records of teacher professional development activities. This analysis aims to verify the alignment between teachers' formal qualifications and their teaching practices (Nasution, 2016).

Data Sources The data sources in this study include Islamic Religious Teachers at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman, who have different academic backgrounds and teaching experiences.

It also includes students from grades X to XII, representing 50% of each grade level, selected based on their academic performance and level of interaction with teachers. Additionally, the school principal serves as a key informant, providing insights into institutional policies related to teacher competencies and professional development support.

Data Analysis Techniques Data analysis is conducted using the thematic analysis method based on the Miles and Huberman approach, which includes the following stages. First, Data Reduction, which involves summarizing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation to highlight key aspects related to teacher competencies. Second, Data Presentation, which organizes the reduced data into relevant themes and presents it in a descriptive narrative format, supported by tables for better understanding. Third, Drawing Conclusions, which synthesizes research findings to answer research questions and provide recommendations for improving teacher competencies in Islamic education (Miles et al., 2016). Furthermore, this study also conducts a critical analysis using educational management theories and relevant discourse. The research findings are then compared with previous studies to provide a more comprehensive perspective. The research findings are then compared with previous studies to provide a more comprehensive perspective. Similar analytical methods have been applied in related studies by Mutawalli et al., Ratnah et al., And Emanuel Hosa et al., which emphasize the effectiveness of thematic analysis in qualitative research, particularly in assessing teacher competencies and student learning outcomes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study examines the role of Islamic religious teachers' holistic competencies—pedagogical, professional, personal, and social—in influencing students' understanding. The findings are structured based on the data collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman.

Table 1. Holistic Competence of Islamic Religious Teachers and its Impact on Student Understanding at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman

No.	Holistic Teacher Competence	Students' Perception of Teachers' Holistic Competence (%)	Students' Level of Understanding (%)	Challenge
1.	Pedagogical (Teaching Metods)	85% of students felt that teachers explained the material clearly, especially in Fiqh and Quran Hadith	High understanding: 91% (Fiqh) 90% (Quran Hadith) Low Understanding: 82% (Islamic History)	Lack of interactive and student centered learning: students tend to be passive listeners
2.	Professional (Teaching skills and Certification)	78% of students rated teachers as having strong subject mastery	Good Understanding: 78% Struggled: 22%	Minimal professional training and lack of technology integration in teaching
3.	Personal (Teachers as Role Models)	90% of students felt that teachers served as role models in islamic and moral values	Positively influenced: 90% Need more mentoring: 10%	Teachers' administrative workload reduced their time for individual student guidance
4.	Social (Teacher Student Interaction)	75% of students felt comfortable discussing religious topic with teachers, but 18% believed that theachers focused more on high achieving students	Sactifactory understanding: 75% Struggled due to lack of attention: 25%	Lack of differentiated instruction, causing lower achieving students to receive insufficient guidance

The pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious teachers at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman plays a crucial role in shaping students' understanding. Most students perceive the teaching methods as clear, particularly in Fiqh and Quran Hadith subjects. As a result, students' comprehension of these subjects is notably high. This may be attributed to the application of real-life examples and practical discussions that facilitate better understanding. However, students' comprehension of Islamic History is comparatively lower. One of the contributing factors is the predominant use of lecture-based teaching, which does not actively engage students in the learning

process. The primary challenge in this aspect is the lack of interactive and student-centered learning methods, which could otherwise enhance student participation and engagement in the classroom.

In terms of professional competence, most students believe that their teachers have a strong mastery of the subject matter. The majority of teachers hold teaching certifications and demonstrate expertise in their respective fields. However, there are challenges in innovation and professional development. While students generally perform well, some struggle due to the limited adaptation of modern teaching techniques. One major factor is the lack of professional training and workshops for teachers in recent years. As a result, teaching methods tend to be conventional, with minimal integration of technology. To improve teaching effectiveness, there is a need to incorporate more diverse and technology-based teaching strategies.

Teachers' personal competence is highly appreciated by students. A significant proportion of students consider their teachers as role models in terms of Islamic values and moral conduct. Teachers not only educate students academically but also guide them in practicing Islamic teachings in their daily lives. This positive influence is reflected in students' motivation to engage in religious studies. However, one significant challenge is the heavy administrative workload of teachers. This workload reduces the time available for individual mentoring, making it difficult for students who require additional support to receive sufficient guidance. Addressing this issue would require reducing administrative tasks so that teachers can focus more on providing academic and personal mentorship to students.

The interaction between teachers and students in religious education is perceived as positive by most students. A majority feel comfortable engaging in religious discussions with their teachers. However, some students believe that teachers tend to focus more on high-achieving students, which results in less attention being given to students who struggle academically. This imbalance affects students' comprehension levels, as those who need more support are less likely to receive the necessary guidance. The challenge in this aspect is the lack of differentiated instruction, which could otherwise ensure equal learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their academic performance.

This study highlights that the holistic competence of Islamic Religious teachers at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman significantly influences students' understanding. Each aspect of teacher competence—pedagogical, professional, personal, and social—has its strengths and challenges. Students show high comprehension levels in Fiqh and Quran Hadith, but other subjects,

particularly Islamic History, require more interactive teaching approaches to enhance understanding. Additionally, the lack of professional training, limited time for mentoring, and the need for inclusive teaching methods remain key challenges in improving teaching effectiveness. Therefore, adopting innovative and inclusive strategies in teaching will ensure that all students receive the necessary support to fully understand Islamic education.

Table 2. Pedagogical Teacher's Competence and Its Impact on Student Understanding at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman

No.	Holistic Teacher Competence	Students' Perception of Teachers' Holistic Competence (%)	Students' Level of Understanding (%)	Challenge
1.	Lesson Structure	90%	85%	Limitations in Students-centered learning
2.	Teaching Methods	85%	85%	Dominance of lecture method, lack of interaction
3.	Interactive Activities	40%	58%	Lack of method variation and approaches
4.	Students Participation	58%	58%	Law student confidence to ask questions

Observations show that teachers have structured lessons well and followed the applicable curriculum. A total of 90% of students have a positive perception of the implemented learning structure, and 85% of students demonstrate a good understanding of the material. However, there are still limitations in student-centered learning, as teachers remain the primary focus in the learning process. In terms of teaching methods, 85% of students believe that teachers explain the material clearly, but the dominance of the lecture method results in a lack of interaction, making learning feel monotonous. The low level of interactive activities is also a challenge, with only 40% of students feeling that the learning process involves active interaction, while their level of understanding in this aspect is only 58%. This is due to the minimal variation in methods and approaches used in the classroom. Additionally, student participation in learning remains relatively low, with only 58% of students feeling they have the opportunity to actively ask questions and engage in discussions. This factor affects their comprehension, which is also at the same percentage. In conclusion, although teachers possess strong competencies in structuring and delivering lessons, improvements are needed to create a more interactive and student-centered learning environment. Implementing more

varied teaching methods and encouraging active student participation can help enhance the effectiveness and engagement of the learning process.

Table 3. Professional Competence and Student Understanding

at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman

No.	Holistic Teacher Competence	Students' Perception of Teachers' Holistic Competence (%)	Students' Level of Understanding (%)	Challenge
1.	Number of Certified Teachers	80%	91%	Some teachers are not yet certifiet
2.	Lesson Plan Aligment with Curriculum	95%	90%	Lack of innovation in teaching
3.	Professional Training	40%	85%	Limited recent teacher training
4.	Use of New Methods	45%	82%	Dominance of conventional methods, lack of innovation

Document analysis shows that four out of five Islamic religious teachers at the school are certified, while one teacher is still in the process of obtaining certification. This is reflected in the positive perception of 80% of students regarding teachers' competence, with 91% of students demonstrating a good understanding of the material. However, the presence of a teacher who has not yet been certified may affect overall teaching standards. In terms of lesson plan alignment with the curriculum, 95% of students believe that teachers have structured their lessons well, and 90% of students understand the material being taught. Nevertheless, there is still a lack of innovation in teaching, as teachers tend to follow the curriculum formally without making many modifications to enhance student engagement.

Regarding professional training, only 40% of students perceive that teachers have participated in recent training, even though 85% of students still understand the material well. This indicates that while teachers have a strong grasp of the subject matter, there are limitations in updating their pedagogical skills. The lack of recent training may lead to stagnation in teaching methods and hinder the effectiveness of learning. Additionally, only 45% of students feel that new teaching methods are being applied, while 82% can still comprehend the material. The dominance of conventional teaching methods without innovation makes learning feel monotonous and less interactive.

Overall, although teachers possess strong subject knowledge and align their lesson plans with the curriculum, improvements are needed in adopting more innovative teaching methods and integrating technology into learning. Enhancing professional training and implementing more interactive teaching strategies can help increase student engagement and comprehension in the learning process.

Table 4. Teacher's Personality and Social Competence

No.	Holistic Teacher Competence		Students' Perception of Teachers' Holistic Competence (%)	Students' Level of Understanding (%)	Challenge
1.	Academic Guidance		88%	90%	Limited teacher time for individual mentoring
2.	Character Building		90%	85%	Lack of personal approach in character development
3.	Teacher Closeness	Student	70%	82%	Theacher are busy with administrative tasks
4.	Teacher Relationship	Student	75%	85%	Limited interaction outside the classroom

Observations indicate that Islamic religious teachers play an active role in guiding students both academically and in character development. This is reflected in the positive perception of 88% of students regarding academic guidance, with 90% demonstrating a strong understanding of the material. However, teachers have limited time for individual mentoring due to their workload, making it difficult to provide personalized support for each student. In terms of character building, 90% of students recognize teachers' contributions, while 85% understand the values being taught. Despite this, there is a lack of personal approaches to character development, as guidance is often given in a general manner without deeper individual interactions.

Regarding teacher-student closeness, 70% of students feel connected to their teachers, and 82% believe this relationship enhances their comprehension of lessons. However, teachers' administrative responsibilities limit their time for social interactions, making students feel less personally attended to outside of academic activities. Similarly, 75% of students perceive their relationship with teachers as positive, with 85% stating that this connection helps them grasp lessons

better. Nonetheless, interactions beyond the classroom remain limited, as communication between teachers and students primarily occurs within formal learning settings.

Overall, teachers serve as strong role models in both academic and character development. However, their administrative workload and the lack of personal engagement outside the classroom restrict further mentoring opportunities. Enhancing teachers' involvement in social interactions beyond the classroom and allocating more time for individual guidance could help strengthen teacher-student relationships, ultimately supporting both academic success and character growth more effectively.

Table 5. Challenges in Teacher Competence

No	Holistic Teacher Competence	Students' Perception of Teachers' Holistic Competence (%)	Students' Level of Understanding (%)	Challenge
1.	Use of Technology in Learning	50%	82%	Minimal integration of technology in teaching
2.	Professional Training	60%	85%	Limited recent teacher training
3.	Student Centered Learning	55%	80%	Dominance of lecture method, lack of interactive activities
4.	Equal Attention to Students	70%	78%	Teachers focus more on high achieving students

Despite the generally strong competence of Islamic religious teachers, several challenges need to be addressed. One of the key areas for improvement is the use of technology in learning. While 50% of students perceive that technology is incorporated into lessons, 82% still manage to understand the material. This indicates that despite students' relatively good comprehension, the integration of digital tools and interactive platforms remains minimal, making lessons less engaging and less aligned with modern educational advancements.

Another challenge lies in professional training, where 60% of students believe their teachers have received adequate training, yet 85% still demonstrate a strong understanding of the lessons. Although teachers' subject mastery remains high, access to recent training programs is limited, especially in areas such as modern teaching strategies and technology-based learning. Without continuous professional development, teachers may struggle to adopt innovative approaches that cater to evolving educational needs.

The student-centered learning approach also presents room for improvement. Only 55% of students feel that lessons are designed around their active participation, while 80% still comprehend the material effectively. This suggests that teacher-centered methods, particularly lectures, continue to dominate classroom instruction. The lack of interactive learning activities limits student engagement and participation. Incorporating more student-centered strategies, such as group discussions, project-based learning, and case studies, could enhance the learning experience.

Lastly, equal attention to students remains a concern. While 70% of students feel they receive fair attention, 78% are able to understand the material well. However, teachers tend to focus more on high-achieving students, leaving those who struggle with the material with less guidance. This gap in attention could lead to disparities in comprehension and motivation among students. Overall, while teachers exhibit strong subject mastery and integrity, further efforts are needed to improve pedagogical and professional competence. Enhancing the use of technology, adopting more interactive teaching methods, and ensuring equal attention to all students will contribute to a more engaging and effective learning environment.

Discussion

Discussion is the most important part of writing a journal article. At this stage, the author must present the thesis and research findings systematically, scientifically, and factually. Explain the impact of research findings and their impact. Then, the writer must compare the results with previous studies relevant to the topic of discussion. The findings of this study highlight the significant role of Islamic religious teachers' holistic competencies—pedagogical, professional, personal, and social—in shaping students' understanding and engagement in religious education. This section discusses how each competency influences learning outcomes, the challenges encountered, and possible recommendations for improvement. The discussion is enriched with relevant literature from recent studies (2020–2024) to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Pedagogical competence is fundamental in facilitating student comprehension, particularly in religious education (Akbar, 2021). Observations revealed that most teachers followed structured lesson plans and used traditional lecture-based methods. While this approach provided clarity, it also limited student engagement and active participation. Students interviewed mentioned that lessons felt monotonous, and they preferred more interactive learning strategies such as discussions, case studies, and technology-based activities.

Several studies suggest that active learning methods enhance comprehension and retention of religious teachings. For example, Ali et al. found that problem-based learning (PBL) increases student engagement and critical thinking in religious studies (Ali et al., 2021). Similarly, Rahman et al. argue that digital tools, such as interactive Quran applications and multimedia-based teaching, significantly improve student participation and interest (Rahman et al., 2022). However, only a few teachers in this study integrated such strategies, indicating the need for pedagogical innovation.

Another issue observed was the limited use of student-centered learning approaches. Research by Ismail and Hassan highlights that incorporating group activities and cooperative learning fosters deeper understanding and encourages students to actively engage with religious concepts. While some teachers in this study attempted discussion-based learning, it was often restricted due to time constraints and curriculum demands. Addressing this challenge requires structured training programs to equip teachers with diverse pedagogical strategies (Ismail & Hassan, 2023).

Furthermore, differentiated instruction is essential for catering to students' varying learning needs. Omar et al. emphasize that Islamic religious education should be tailored to accommodate diverse student abilities. The observations in this study indicated that struggling students often received less attention, leading to gaps in understanding. Providing teachers with targeted training on differentiated instruction can help bridge these gaps and ensure that all students benefit from religious education (S. Omar et al., 2024).

Professional competence is another critical factor influencing teaching effectiveness (González-Fernández et al., 2024; Yang & Kaiser, 2023). The document analysis revealed that while most teachers possessed relevant qualifications, only a few actively participated in continuous professional development programs (Sari & Munawar, 2024). Teachers themselves acknowledged that they relied on past knowledge rather than engaging in ongoing training. This lack of continuous learning is a concern, as numerous studies emphasize the importance of professional development in improving instructional quality. According to Mahmud and Ismail, teachers who engage in regular training demonstrate higher adaptability to contemporary teaching methodologies (Mahmud & Ismail, 2023). Similarly, Al Qahtani and Higgens highlight that ongoing workshops and peer-learning sessions significantly enhance teachers' ability to integrate modern educational tools (Al-Qahtani & Higgins, 2021).

Another key issue is the underutilization of digital resources. Studies by Yusof et al. and Khalid et al. confirm that digital literacy is essential in modern Islamic education. However, teachers in this study relied heavily on conventional teaching materials, limiting opportunities for students to explore digital Islamic resources. Implementing mandatory professional training in digital pedagogy can help address this gap (Khalid et al., 2022; Yusof et al., 2021). Moreover, collaboration among educators plays a crucial role in professional growth. Research by Pambudi suggests that mentorship programs and teacher collaboration networks contribute to higher teaching efficacy. Encouraging peer learning and knowledge exchange among Islamic religious teachers can foster a culture of continuous improvement (Pambudi et al., 2023). Personal competence is essential in shaping students' moral and ethical values. The findings indicate that students highly regard their teachers as role models, with 90% of students acknowledging their teachers' discipline, integrity, and positive influence. Teachers actively guided students in religious practices, reinforcing Islamic values beyond the classroom.

A study by Hamzah et al. found that students are more likely to internalize religious teachings when their teachers consistently exhibit ethical behavior. The observations in this study confirm that teachers' conduct significantly impacts students' attitudes toward religious learning (Hamzah et al., 2022). However, balancing personal and professional responsibilities remains a challenge. Research by Aziz et al. highlights that Islamic teachers often experience burnout due to administrative duties and high expectations. Some teachers in this study mentioned struggling to provide individualized guidance due to workload constraints. Addressing this requires institutional support, such as reducing administrative burdens and providing counseling services for educators (Aziz et al., 2021). Moreover, mentorship programs for new teachers can enhance their ability to serve as role models. Omar and Hashim argue that structured mentorship enhances teachers' confidence in guiding students both academically and spiritually. Schools should consider implementing mentorship initiatives to sustain high personal competence levels among teachers (Omar & Hashim, 2023).

Social competence refers to teachers' ability to build meaningful relationships with students and foster an inclusive learning environment. The study found that while teachers generally maintained a strong rapport with students, some learners felt that struggling students received less attention. Strong teacher-student relationships have been linked to higher student motivation and engagement. Khan et al. found that students who perceive their teachers as approachable and

supportive demonstrate greater enthusiasm for religious studies. The findings in this study align with this perspective, as students expressed appreciation for teachers who actively listened and provided moral guidance (Khan et al., 2021).

However, inclusivity remains a challenge. Research by Saleh et al. highlights that differentiated instruction is essential for addressing diverse student needs in religious education. Teachers in this study tended to focus more on high-performing students, leaving weaker students feeling neglected. Schools should implement intervention programs to support students requiring additional assistance (Saleh. et al., 2023). Furthermore, the integration of socio-emotional learning (SEL) into Islamic education can enhance teacher-student interactions. According to Ibrahim and Latif, incorporating SEL principles fosters empathy, communication skills, and a supportive learning atmosphere (Ibrahim. & Latif, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the holistic competencies of Islamic religious teachers—pedagogical, professional, personal, and social—significantly influence students' understanding and engagement in religious education at MA Muhammadiyah 06 Payaman. Teachers with strong pedagogical competence enhance student comprehension, yet the dominance of lecture-based methods limits interaction, highlighting the need for more dynamic teaching approaches. Professional competence is crucial for instructional quality, but limited professional development opportunities hinder teachers' ability to integrate modern teaching strategies, including technology. Personal competence is the strongest aspect, as teachers serve as role models; however, workload pressures reduce their capacity for individualized mentoring. Social competence plays a vital role in fostering teacher-student relationships, but unequal attention to students, particularly those who struggle academically, affects overall learning outcomes. To improve Islamic religious education, structured teacher training programs focusing on pedagogical innovation, professional development, and inclusive teaching methods are essential.

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