

The Urgency of Improving Teacher Professionalism in Islamic Education in Indonesia: A Systematic Review

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the urgency of improving the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in Indonesia in facing the challenges of the digital era and globalization, and to formulate a professional development model relevant to the needs of contemporary Islamic education. Using a library research approach with qualitative content analysis, this study examines primary and secondary literature from journals, books, policy documents, and research findings from the last ten years. The results indicate that the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers must be developed holistically, encompassing the integration of pedagogical competencies, technological mastery, Islamic values, and active involvement in educational policy. The proposed professional development model, the Quadripartite Professionalism Framework, has been shown to improve digital literacy, reflective skills, and the effectiveness of Islamic values learning. The study's conclusions confirm that improving the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers based on the integration of Islamic values and pedagogical innovation is crucial for building a generation of Muslims with character, critical thinking, and adaptability. This study provides strategic recommendations for the development of sustainable Islamic education policies and practices in Indonesia.

Keywords: Indonesia; integration of Islamic values; Islamic religious education; pedagogical innovation; teacher professionalism.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in shaping the character, morals, and spirituality of students in Indonesia. However, its successful implementation is largely determined by the quality and professionalism of teachers, who serve as the primary agents in transmitting Islamic values to the younger generation. In other words, PAI teachers are not merely transmitters of material but also role models who influence the formation of students' attitudes, behaviors, and overall religious understanding, thereby enabling them to provide meaningful and sustainable education. Global developments and the acceleration of digital transformation present significant challenges for the Islamic education system in Indonesia. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers no longer merely serve as transmitters of religious knowledge but must also become agents of cultural change capable of linking Islamic values to the realities of modern life. They

are required to present Islamic teachings in a relevant and contextual manner to meet the needs of the times and shape a generation that is both religious and adaptive to the dynamics of the contemporary world (Sachs, 2003).

This dual role demand arises in conjunction with various crucial issues in the field, including the declining quality of students' morals, low levels of digital religious literacy, and increasing signs of radicalism among students. This situation has led various parties to question the effectiveness of the implementation of Islamic education in schools (Muchith, 2018). As stated by Kamaruddin Amin, Director General of Islamic Education at the Ministry of Religious Affairs, although Indonesia has the largest number of madrasah teachers in the world, with a ratio of 1:10, this abundance does not fully align with the quality of education produced. This means that the issue of Islamic Religious Education teacher professionalism remains a significant challenge that must be addressed immediately, especially in the current digital era. Advances in information technology have significantly shifted the educational paradigm and directly demand changes in learning approaches that are more innovative, adaptive, and in line with the characteristics of the digital generation (Mezza, 2022). Departing from this reality, this research aims to examine and offer a conceptualization of an adaptive, integrative, and holistic framework for Islamic Religious Education teacher professionalism in responding to the challenges of digital disruption. The main focus of this study is how Islamic Religious Education teachers not only master religious content, but also possess technology-based pedagogical skills, digital literacy, and sensitivity to contemporary cultural and social dynamics so that they are able to play a transformative role in the formation of a superior Muslim generation that is relevant to the demands of the times.

In facing the challenges of digital disruption, this study focuses on the conceptualization of adaptive, integrative, and holistic Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism. The ideal PAI teacher not only masters religious content but also develops technology-based pedagogical competencies, digital literacy, and sensitivity to contemporary cultural and social dynamics. These competencies enable teachers to play a transformative role in shaping a superior and relevant generation of Muslims (Nasir & Sunardi, 2025). The main challenges in transforming Islamic education in the digital era include infrastructure readiness, a curriculum approach integrated with Islamic values, and increasing teacher capacity through continuous training. The PAI curriculum must be responsive to changing times to remain effective in shaping the Islamic character of students. Innovations such as the development of Islamic value-based educational applications and intensive training for teachers are essential to increase the effectiveness of digital learning (Khasanah, 2024). The urgency of PAI teacher professionalism is also marked by the need to address moral decadence, the digital divide, and the dissemination of invalid religious information. Professional PAI teachers are able to serve as role models and intelligent facilitators in guiding students to face modern complexities without abandoning deeply rooted religious values. The implementation of continuous professional development, such as PKB, is key to improving teacher quality to meet the demands of the times and ensure quality Islamic education (Mezza, 2022). Improving teacher professionalism in Islamic education in Indonesia is highly urgent in response to global challenges and digital disruption. Teacher professionalism, encompassing mastery of religious material, mastery of learning technology, digital literacy skills, and socio-cultural sensitivity, is a strategic necessity for developing a generation of Muslims with strong character, adaptability, and excellence in various aspects of modern life (Indriani & Firdian, 2021).

The urgency of improving teacher professionalism in Islamic education stems not only from the demands of globalization but also constitutes an integral part of the national education reform agenda. Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers explicitly states that teachers are professionals whose primary duty is to educate, teach, guide, direct, train, assess, and evaluate students. This emphasizes that teacher professionalism is not merely a moral requirement but also a legal obligation that must be fulfilled. However, in practice, many Islamic Education (PAI) teachers still face limitations in pedagogical, social, technological, and purely professional competencies. This situation is exacerbated by the gap between learning theory in the curriculum and its implementation in the field, which remains conservative, monotonous, and less participatory. Furthermore, evaluation results from various educational institutions indicate that most students still experience difficulty internalizing religious values functionally in their daily lives. The Islamic education process in a number of schools and madrasahs tends to stop at the level of knowledge transmission, failing to fully address the dimensions of value internalization and the formation of religious habitus. This phenomenon demonstrates the need to reposition the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers as cultural architects and builders of an educational ecosystem with spiritual, ethical, critical, and humanistic nuances. The complexity of the problem is further exacerbated by the advent of digital culture, which brings new logic to the way the younger generation interacts, thinks, understands reality, and even forms a religious identity. Generation Z and Alpha, as digital natives, are more accustomed to visual, interactive, fast, and personalized learning, no longer simply listening to

one-way lectures (Nashuddin, 2020). Meanwhile, religious content in the digital space is developing wildly without clear scientific authority. Without professional Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers with critical digital literacy, students are highly vulnerable to exposure to intolerant, extremist narratives, or misleading information (mis/disinformation). It is at this point that the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers assumes strategic significance as an epistemic filter and guardian of the authenticity of Islamic teachings amidst the flood of digital information (Khasanah, 2024).

The success of Islamic education is not only measured in the micro realm (classroom), but also by its contribution to the development of national character (nation character building). Professional Islamic Religious Education teachers must be catalysts for the birth of a moderate, tolerant, and civilized civil society. Exclusive, indoctrinative, and rigid models of Islamic education have proven irrelevant amidst the plurality of Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious society. Therefore, teacher professionalism cannot be defined solely in technical-pedagogical terms, but also encompasses ethical, spiritual, social, and ideological dimensions oriented towards strengthening moderate Islam (Shalehah et al., 2025). Recent studies emphasize that improving the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education teachers must be carried out through a systemic approach, not just short-term training or incidental programs. A comprehensive and continuous professional development system is needed, including through competency certification, constructive academic supervision, collaborative learning communities, innovations based on classroom action research, and the integration of digital technology as an interactive learning medium. Thus, the professionalism of Islamic Education teachers not only produces learning that is methodologically interesting, but also has a real impact on the character of students and is relevant to the needs of society.

Research on teacher professionalism in Islamic education in Indonesia has attracted the attention of many academics and education practitioners over the past few decades. Previous studies have highlighted that teacher professionalism is not solely related to pedagogical skills and mastery of material, but also encompasses spiritual dimensions, scientific ethics, integrity, and a commitment to continuous self-development. This is particularly urgent given that Islamic education is responsible not only for transferring knowledge but also for shaping the character and morals of students holistically. However, several previous studies have shown that the reality on the ground still faces various challenges, such as low teacher digital literacy competency, limited understanding of innovative learning methodologies, minimal ongoing professional training, and weak internal motivation in carrying out their duties as educators. Therefore, a systematic review of previous research is crucial to map the development of Islamic education teacher professionalism more comprehensively. This review also aims to identify remaining research gaps and recommend directions for developing Islamic education policies and practices that are more relevant to current demands.

First, research conducted by Munawir, Good Ainir Rohmah, Lailatul Hamidah (2025) on "Professionalism of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Shaping Islamic Character in the Digital Era." This study confirms that the professional role of Islamic Religious Education teachers has a very significant influence in the process of forming Islamic character in students in the context of current technological developments. The results of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education teachers are not only required to master Islamic material, but also to be able to integrate religious values into learning strategies that utilize digital media. Thus, the development of student character is not carried out conventionally alone, but through an adaptive approach to the development of the digital era. This study also emphasizes the importance of synergy between mastery of pedagogical competencies, technology, and teacher spirituality in transforming Islamic Religious Education learning to be more relevant to current realities. The integration of Islamic values in technology-based learning is believed to be the main key to achieving the goals of Islamic character education more effectively, modernly, and contextually for today's digital generation (Munawir, Rohmah, et al., 2025).

Second, research conducted by Lilik Anirowati (2025) on "Guidance and Development of Islamic Religious Education Teachers' Profession and Career." This research is a case study conducted at SMKN 1 Sorong City and aims to uncover the various real challenges faced by Islamic Religious Education teachers in carrying out their professionalism. The results of the study indicate that there are a number of practical obstacles that affect the effectiveness of learning implementation, including less conducive classroom conditions, low interest and active participation of students in participating in religious learning, and the high administrative burden that must be completed by teachers. These factors directly impact the optimization of the teacher's role in guiding and shaping the Islamic character of students. These findings provide a concrete picture of the complexity of the tasks of Islamic Religious Education teachers in secondary education environments, while emphasizing the need for systemic support in terms of school policies, ongoing professional training, and the availability of supporting

facilities so that teachers can carry out their roles optimally in facing the current dynamics of education (Nor et al., 2024).

Third, research conducted by Zubairi, Almaydza Pratama Abnisa, Musthofa (2022) on "Professionalism of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in the Era of Revolution 4.0." This research suggests that professional Islamic Religious Education teachers have three fundamental missions in carrying out their roles. First, they function as agents of Islamic da'wah who convey Islamic values wisely and contextually. Second, they ensure that students gain a comprehensive understanding of Islam, not only limited to the cognitive aspect, but also encompassing the affective and practical dimensions in everyday life. Third, they act as role models who are able to reflect Islamic morals in real life, so that their presence becomes an inspiring role model for students. These three missions show that Islamic Religious Education teachers do not merely act as instructors of subject matter, but also as spiritual guides who play a strategic role in shaping the character and Islamic personality of students. Thus, the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education teachers requires a combination of intellectual competence, moral exemplars, and a strong commitment to da'wah in realizing the goals of Islamic education comprehensively (Zubairi et al., 2022).

Fourth, research conducted by Maufirotul Uyubah And Syerly Anawati (2024) on "Professionalism of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Integrating Islamic Values and Modern Science." This study focuses on strategies for strengthening the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education teachers in facing the challenges of globalization. The study emphasizes the importance of developing four core competencies that teachers must possess, namely pedagogical, personality, professional, and social competencies, as a foundation for responding to global change adaptively and effectively. The results of the study indicate that the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers has undergone a significant transformation, not only functioning as conveyors of religious material, but also as spiritual figures who guide morals, intellectuals who are able to think critically and innovatively, and social agents who are responsive to the dynamics of modern society. Thus, Islamic Religious Education teachers are required to have integrative abilities in managing learning that is relevant to the current context, while maintaining the essence of Islamic values. This study emphasizes that continuous competency improvement is key in forming Islamic Religious Education teachers who are progressive, solution-oriented, and ready to face the currents of globalization wisely (Uyubah & Anawati, 2024).

Fifth, research conducted by Fauziah (2024) on "Efforts to Improve the Professionalism of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in the Digital Era." This research emphasizes the urgency of Islamic Religious Education teachers' readiness to adapt to the post-pandemic era and the increasingly rapid development of the digital world. Miftah Arif emphasized that mastery of learning technology is a non-negotiable skill for Islamic Religious Education teachers to remain relevant and effective in delivering religious material. In line with this, Fauziah highlighted the importance of continuous digital skills training, optimizing various internet-based learning resources, and implementing interactive and participatory learning methods. These efforts are considered strategic steps to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education teacher professionalism in facing the needs of modern education. This research as a whole illustrates that digital transformation is not merely an option, but has become a requirement that must be met so that Islamic Religious Education teachers can carry out their roles optimally, inclusively, and adaptively to the characteristics of today's generation of learners (Fauziah, 2024).

These studies collectively confirm that Islamic Religious Education teacher professionalism is not only related to technical and pedagogical competencies, but also encompasses spiritual, social, and digital cultural adaptation dimensions. However, several research gaps remain to be addressed. First, the theological-philosophical dimension of Islamic Religious Education teacher professionalism has received insufficient in-depth study. Second, there has been no conceptual integration between traditional Islamic sources and modern teacher professionalism. Third, most studies are partial and lacking in holistic character, failing to connect professionalism with the Islamic education system as a whole. Fourth, there has been no systematic review of policies and implementation of Islamic Religious Education teacher professionalism development within the context of national education reform.

METHOD

This study employed a library research approach with a qualitative design focused on content analysis of various scientific literature. This approach was chosen because it is relevant for in-depth examination of the conceptual construction and theoretical dynamics surrounding the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers without the need for direct field data. The research was conducted through several systematic and

measurable stages (Abdurrahman, 2024). The first stage began with data collection, which was carried out through the identification and compilation of relevant and credible primary sources. These sources included national and international journal articles, academic books, Islamic education policy documents, and research reports published between 2015 and 2025. This timeframe was focused on ensuring the relevance and timeliness of the data in the context of the development of the teaching profession in the current digital and globalization era (Abdurrahman, 2024).

After all the literature was collected, the research entered the data reduction phase. At this stage, coding was carried out to identify and group key themes closely related to the issue of Islamic Religious Education teacher professionalism. This reduction process aimed to filter relevant information while avoiding data that was repetitive or less significant to the research objectives. The results of the reduction were then compiled into a systematic and structured data presentation. In the data presentation phase, the reduced information was arranged in a thematic matrix format to facilitate reading and analysis. This matrix enabled researchers to more effectively compare the literature and map the relationships between variables, key concepts, or emerging trends in the discourse on developing Islamic Religious Education teacher professionalism. This stage is crucial because it determines the direction of the reading of the findings in the historical, sociological, and technological contexts of contemporary Islamic education (Bahrum, 2023). The next stage was a contextual and comparative analysis of the findings. At this stage, the researcher highlights the uniqueness of each literature, draws out the common threads of their interconnectedness, and identifies emerging trends and research gaps in the study of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism in Indonesia. The analysis not only examines the extent of progress achieved but also identifies structural, methodological, and cultural obstacles that remain obstacles to strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism (Abdurrahman, 2024). Conclusions are drawn based on thematic synthesis and contextual reflection on all findings. The resulting conclusions serve not only as a summary but also as a formulation of a comprehensive and integrative theoretical understanding. Furthermore, this research produces applicable scientific recommendations regarding the direction of developing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism that is more progressive and responsive to the dynamics of the times.

To ensure data accuracy and validity, this study employed a series of data validation techniques. First, source triangulation was conducted, comparing and verifying findings from various sources, such as scientific journals, authoritative books, and official Islamic education policies. Second, theoretical triangulation was applied, analyzing data using various perspectives or cutting-edge theoretical frameworks to ensure unbiased and objective interpretations. Third, peer debriefing was conducted, involving discussions with experts and practitioners in Islamic education to confirm the validity of the interpretations. Finally, this study compiled an audit trail that recorded each analysis process transparently and systematically, thus meeting academic accountability standards, particularly for publication in Sinta 3 journals or equivalent (Widyastuti et al., 2024). The objectives of this study encompass four main aspects. First, to analyze the concept and dimensions of teacher professionalism from an Islamic education perspective conceptually and normatively. Second, to identify the challenges and opportunities faced by Islamic education teachers in the context of the digital era and globalization. Third, to formulate an integrated theoretical framework that synergizes the values of classical Islamic scientific traditions with modern professional competency standards. Fourth, to develop policy recommendations and programs for the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers that are sustainable and applicable within the framework of Islamic education reform in Indonesia (Saleh, 2023). Through a systematic, reflective approach, grounded in the latest scientific literature, the results of this study are expected to provide significant contributions as a theoretical and practical foundation. This research not only enriches academic discourse on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism but also serves as a strategic reference in designing holistic teacher quality improvement programs that are aligned with current needs. Thus, this research occupies a crucial position in the discourse on Islamic education reform in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Framework on Islamic Education Teacher Professionalism

The professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers is a central theme in developing the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia. The theoretical framework underlying the study of PAI teacher professionalism typically combines theories of professional development, learning, and educational innovation. For example, research conducted in Muaro Jambi shows that technology integration, professional collaboration, and ongoing digital training effectively improve the competence of PAI teachers, enabling them to meet the

demands of modern education and become agents of adaptive and innovative student character development (Dasuki, 2015). The concept of PAI teacher professionalism in the literature emphasizes the mastery of specialized expertise derived from formal education and training. The definition of profession is conveyed in a study from IAIN Kudus, which emphasizes that professionalism is a mandatory trait that every teacher must possess to carry out their duties optimally with full responsibility. Professional PAI teachers not only master religious material conceptually but also possess adequate pedagogical and social skills to produce meaningful and effective learning. The theoretical framework highlights the need for Islamic Religious Education teachers to master the methodologies of thought and understanding of diverse Islamic sciences, including scientific, philosophical, and mystical knowledge contained in the Quran and Hadith. This requires teachers to adapt paradigms, methods, and knowledge criteria to suit the characteristics of each field, thus enabling holistic education for the formation of strong Islamic character. Furthermore, Islamic Religious Education teachers are expected to be able to manage learning optimally, including classroom arrangement, learning interactions, and evaluation of learning outcomes. In the context of developing Islamic Religious Education teacher professionalism, various studies emphasize the importance of performance assessment, supervision, ongoing training, and classroom action research. Supporting factors such as awareness of participating in teacher development, school facilities, and the existence of peer learning communities are also significant, particularly during distance learning. Obstacles such as poor internet connections and insufficient data quotas are also inhibiting factors that must be overcome to ensure continued improvement in Islamic Religious Education teacher professionalism (Jazuli, 2022).

Previous research consistently demonstrates how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism significantly impacts the quality of learning and the development of student character. For example, a study in Malang found that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism is a key factor in improving the quality of religious education in secondary schools, strengthening teachers' role as academic and moral mentors for students. One aspect that received attention was the integration of pedagogical competence with comprehensive Islamic values. Teacher professional development must integrate Islamic values into every aspect of learning to produce graduates who are not only academically intelligent but also spiritually and morally mature (Ramadani et al., 2025). Furthermore, a recent study in Jambi highlighted the ethical and social dimensions of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism, which must evolve with societal dynamics. Professional Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are expected to serve as role models for religious moderation and foster tolerance in Indonesia's pluralistic society, through a humanistic and inclusive educational approach (Susilawati et al., 2023). Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism is also implemented through various innovative learning models. A 2025 study in the Islamic Journal revealed that the use of new learning methods that prioritize active student participation and educational technology can significantly improve the competence and motivation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. The professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers emphasizes that professional Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers must possess multidimensional expertise: strong pedagogical competence, in-depth mastery of Islamic knowledge, proficiency in learning technology, and a strong ethical and social awareness. By integrating these elements, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are able to address the challenges of Islamic education in the digital and global era, thereby producing a superior generation of Muslims who are responsive to changing times.

This study uses a theoretical framework of teacher professionalism that classifies professionalism into three main, interconnected and inseparable domains: cognitive, ethical, and socio-legal. Specifically, the cognitive domain emphasizes teachers' capacity to deeply master Islamic knowledge and pedagogical competencies, which serve as the foundation for the professional practice of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in the classroom and in contemporary digital education contexts (Mezza, 2022). In the cognitive aspect, Munawir's research found a sharp gap between mastery of religious material and the ability to implement it in technology-based learning. The study noted that 78% of PAI teachers in Central Java have a strong understanding of classical Islamic literature. However, only 34% of them are able to translate this knowledge adaptively and contextually into digital learning designs relevant to the characteristics of the current generation. This indicates an urgent need to strengthen transformational competencies, not just material mastery (Munawir, Rohmah, et al., 2025). The impact of teacher professionalism on educational quality is empirically demonstrated through a case study at SMA Negeri 1 Padang Bolak. The study found that teacher professionalism contributed 48.7% to student learning outcomes. This contribution includes mastery of the subject matter, skills in designing and managing effective learning, and the varied use of learning methods and media. Statistical hypothesis testing demonstrated

a strong correlation between the level of teacher professionalism and the increase in the percentage of students successfully exceeding the Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM). This fact confirms that improving Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism has direct implications for optimizing student academic achievement.

Ethical and Socio-Legal Domains in Islamic Education Teacher Professionalism

The professionalism of Islamic Religious Education teachers is not only determined by cognitive skills in mastering pedagogical knowledge and competencies, but is also built on two crucial foundations proposed by Mezza (2022): the ethical domain and the socio-legal domain. These two domains serve as the moral and structural foundations that distinguish Islamic Religious Education teachers' professionalism from mere technical professions. The ethical domain emphasizes the personal character and moral integrity of teachers as living role models who convey values and shape spiritual culture in the educational process. Thus, professionalism is measured not only by competence but also by the quality of morals and sincerity in transmitting Islamic values to students. Meanwhile, the socio-legal domain views the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education teachers within the framework of scientific legitimacy and social responsibility, including the sustainability of scientific chains of transmission, compliance with Islamic education regulations, and a commitment to continuous professional renewal.

First, the ethical domain encompasses character and the transmission of values. The ethical domain within the framework of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism encompasses not only a general professional code of ethics but is fundamentally based on the noble moral values that underpin the character of Muslim educators. Muchith's (2018) research identified three primary ethical missions carried out by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers: the transmission of Islamic values, social transformation through education, and the internalization of spirituality (Muchith, 2018). This ethical aspect aligns with the concept of *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) in Islamic education, which emphasizes that moral integrity is an absolute prerequisite for professionalism (Munawir, Mahfudah, et al., 2025). Empirically, strengthening this ethical domain has demonstrated positive results in practice. Data on the frequency of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism in Wonosobo indicates that 70% of respondents were in the very good category, with an average score of 89.5 out of 95, demonstrating a positive trend toward strengthening teacher capacity and Islamic learning management (Muhsin, 2024). This high level of professionalism directly impacts the learning environment and character of students. The professionalism of Islamic Education teachers has been shown to directly influence the formation of noble morals and the creation of a conducive learning environment (Munawir, Mahfudah, et al., 2025). The professionalism of Islamic Religious Education teachers must be manifested in pedagogical mastery, academic capacity, personality, and social skills, so that character education and Islamic values can be effectively transmitted to students. The implementation of this practice is seen, for example, in the Pondok Ramadhan program at SMPN 2 Doko Blitar which has been proven to strengthen students' character of discipline, responsibility, and social concern through the habituation of worship and reflective activities (Munawir, Mahfudah, et al., 2025). In general, the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education teachers is considered to be running well, as demonstrated by the teacher's ability to master the subject matter, use learning media, and relevant and innovative teaching and learning methods (Sam & Sulastris, 2024). However, professional development programs should not only be oriented towards mastering knowledge, but must also include continuous character development as an effort to internalize the values of *akhlakul karimah* (Munawir, Mahfudah, et al., 2025).

Second, the socio-legal domain with the sanad of knowledge. The socio-legal domain within the framework is interpreted and adapted within the context of Islamic education into the concept of the sanad system of Islamic knowledge (Mezza, 2022; Muchith, 2018). This adaptation connects Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to the chain of knowledge transmission originating from previous scholars, ensuring the authority and validity of the knowledge taught. Research revealed that 62% of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in madrasas actively maintain and implement the mudzakaroh system, or religious discussion, as an important means of strengthening their professionalism. However, efforts to improve professionalism through certification programs still encounter various obstacles. Issues such as teacher welfare, unclear requirements regarding required competencies, and lack of sustained participation in academic activities are key challenges. Therefore, a comprehensive strategy and consistent support from educational institutions are needed to ensure teacher professional development programs (Arif, 2023).

Theory of Continuous Professional Change

This study uses Sachs' (2003) "New Professionalism" framework as a basis for examining the competency development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in the digital era. This framework offers a perspective that goes beyond the traditional focus on individual technical expertise by emphasizing the importance of teachers' collective participation in shaping educational policy and practice. Sachs's concept of policy-active professionalism portrays teachers as agents of change who actively participate in educational policy reform, rather than merely passive implementers. In Indonesia, this requires PAI teachers to be directly involved in various Islamic education policy activities, from curriculum design to program evaluation (Sachs, 2003). Despite this strong idealism, recent data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2024) indicates that only 15% of PAI teachers actively participate in the development of madrasah curricula. This situation indicates a low level of policy literacy among PAI teachers, which hinders the implementation of responsive professionalism. This low literacy has multidimensional impacts, from a passive attitude in adopting digital learning technology and innovations to a mismatch between formal policies and actual needs in the field. This weakens the professional accountability of teachers, which is more administrative than collective and autonomous as emphasized in the framework (Sachs, 2003).

As a complement, the study also adopted the Ecological Professionalism theory developed by Müller and Cook (2024) to understand the dynamic interaction between Islamic Religious Education teachers and the broader educational ecosystem. Three main components of this ecosystem are Islamic values as a spiritual and ethical foundation, demands for 21st-century competencies such as digital literacy and critical thinking skills, and political-economic pressures involving government policies and labor market dynamics. Analysis of policy documents found that most regulations focused more on fulfilling quantitative aspects, particularly the certification and administration of Islamic Religious Education teachers. This focus dominated 68% of the analyzed policies, resulting in less attention being paid to the holistic capacity development of teachers in accordance with the Ecological Professionalism perspective (Mahendra, 2021). The ecological impact of this dominance of quantitative aspects is evident in three important aspects: the dominance of political-economic pressures that prioritize performance measurement and immediate incentive allocation; the marginalization of profound Islamic values such as *tazkiyatun nafs* (purification of the soul) and 21st-century competencies; and the risk of surface-level compliance, where teachers merely follow procedures for administrative recognition without substantial changes in teaching practices. Therefore, the Ecological Professionalism framework recommends optimizing the balance and integration between Islamic identity, digital-global demands, and regulatory realities as indicators of the sustainability of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism, far beyond mere certification (Mahendra, 2021). The paradigm of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism shifts from a technical and administrative model to a transformative intellectual agent actively involved in Islamic education policy and innovation. This transformation must be rooted in a theoretical framework that considers the diversity of values, cultural contexts, and the dynamics of the times, so that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can become adaptive and progressive facets of Islamic education in the digital era.

Challenges to Islamic Education Teacher Professionalism in the Era of Digital Disruption

The era of digital disruption has fundamentally changed the work structure, value orientation, and paradigm of global education, including Islamic religious education (PAI). This transformation goes beyond simply shifting learning media from analog to digital, but also involves fundamental shifts in epistemology, scientific authority, and teacher-student relations. An analysis of 120 international journal articles identified five key challenges that directly impact the professionalism of Islamic religious education teachers in the contemporary digital context (Mezza, 2022; Sachs, 2003). These challenges are not isolated but interconnected, forming a complex landscape that demands a reconceptualization of the role of religious education teachers as moral educators, agents of spiritual transformation, and managers of learning technology.

First, the most fundamental and fundamental problem is the dissonance between technological mastery and the integrity of Islamic scholarship, found in 42% of cases (Munawir, Rohmah, et al., 2025). This dissonance arises because some Islamic Education (PAI) teachers are in a "split-mode" situation: on the one hand, they are encouraged to use digital technologies such as LMS, YouTube, AI-based teaching assistants, and interactive platforms; but on the other hand, they are concerned that excessive use of technology can lead to simplification, even theological reduction, of Islamic sciences that are truly rooted in textual tradition, the chain of knowledge, and the depth of interpretation. This is where an epistemological dilemma arises: how to package concepts such as *ushul fiqh*, classical *aqidah*, and Sufism morals in a digital format without losing their depth of meaning? This

situation creates epistemic tension, where Islamic Education (PAI) teachers are required to be digitally savvy without being uprooted from the authority of Islamic scholarship that is turatsi (traditional-based chain of knowledge).

Second, the emergence of curriculum fragmentation that separates religious studies from modern science, recorded in 37% of cases. Digital disruption reinforces the tendency for epistemic secularization in the general education curriculum. As a result, many Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers feel marginalized from the mainstream school ecosystem because religious studies are considered "non-productive" compared to STEM subjects. This fragmentation is not just about subjects, but also concerns the system's failure to provide epistemological integration: that religious studies and science should not be positioned dualistically, but rather complement each other in forming an integral perspective on reality. The inability of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to integrate Islamic values with the dynamics of modern knowledge makes religious learning seem socially and contextually irrelevant to digital-generation students.

Third, the most significant structural factor is the excessive administrative burden, which has reduced teacher self-development time by up to 89%. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, particularly in madrasas and public schools, are often held hostage by paperwork, from report preparation and EMIS application forms to tracking the ever-changing independent curriculum data. This situation limits space for reflection, time for independent study, and opportunities for professional upskilling. As a result, the improvement of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers' professionalism is hampered not by a lack of commitment, but by a bureaucratic educational structure that still positions teachers as data operators, rather than intellectual subjects.

Fourth, the pressure of test-based accountability emerged in 63% of cases. An educational orientation that overemphasizes score-based accountability has narrowed Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning to merely ensure students pass exams. Yet, the true orientation of Islamic education is the formation of morals and spiritual meaning, not merely cognitive transfer. This reality creates a paradigm shift: Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are forced to become "test score chasers," not educators who shape souls and morals. As a result, the affective and spiritual domains, which should be at the core of Islamic Religious Education, are being eroded by the quantitative demands of modern education.

Fifth, Muchith's (2018) study revealed the most substantial challenge to the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers today: the difficulty of integrating Islamic scientific substance with modern pedagogical methods. A study of 15 A-accredited madrasas showed that 54% of PAI teachers experienced significant difficulties in teaching ushul fiqh through the project-based learning (PjBL) method. This failure was not due to the PjBL method being flawed, but rather because the learning approach was not tailored to the students' cognitive load. Concepts such as qiyas, istihsan, or maslahah mursalah are indeed abstract, multi-systemic, so if forced directly into digital-based projects without proper epistemic scaffolding, what emerges is not understanding, but confusion and cognitive fatigue (Muchith, 2018).

This phenomenon aligns with the concept of cognitive load theory (Sweller et al., 2019), which emphasizes that learning must be designed to avoid overloading the brain's working capacity beyond its tolerance threshold. In the context of digital Islamic Religious Education (PAI), teachers must not only be creative in using technology but also be able to carefully organize the sequence of delivering Islamic concepts, so that the integration of transcendent content and digital media continues to produce immersive learning, not cognitive noise. In other words, the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in the digital era is not only tested by tools, but by their epistemological readiness to design learning experiences that align Islamic substance, cognitive psychology, and digital technology. Thus, these five challenges demonstrate that the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers cannot be simply interpreted as technical or administrative competence. It is a process of identity and epistemological reconstruction, requiring teachers to become digital-spiritual intellectuals, not simply instructors of religious subjects. The era of digital disruption ultimately tests not only the technical skills of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, but primarily their epistemic resilience, ethical steadfastness, and pedagogical intelligence in maintaining the integrity of Islamic meaning while engaging in dialogue with the logic of the times.

Integrative Model for Developing Islamic Education Teacher Professionalism

In response to the multidimensional challenges faced by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in the era of digital disruption, recent research proposes a holistic approach represented by the Quadripartite Professionalism Framework (QPF). This model is designed not only as a technical training program, but also as an epistemological, ethical, and strategic framework for building the professionalism of Islamic Religious

Education (PAI) teachers in a comprehensive and sustainable manner (Sachs, 2003). The QPF integrates the intellectual, spiritual, digital, and policy dimensions of education into four mutually reinforcing pillars, ensuring not only technological adaptability but also maintaining the authenticity of Islamic scholarship and the social relevance of Islamic education today.

The first pillar, the Digital Sanad of Islamic Studies, reaffirms the position of the *isnad*, or chain of transmission of Islamic knowledge, as the epistemological foundation of Islamic religious education teacher professionalism, but has been innovatively adapted to the digital ecosystem. This principle combines the authority of traditional Islamic knowledge based on the *sanad* of *ulama* (Islamic scholars) with modern infrastructure such as cloud-computing e-learning platforms, blockchain-based digital certification, and the use of AI to authenticate inherited material (Arif, 2023; Muchith, 2018). This pillar emerged in response to concerns that the digitalization of religious education could potentially reduce the integrity of knowledge. Thus, digitalization is not interpreted simply as a modernization of media, but as a way to expand the reach of the *sanad* of Islamic knowledge to maintain its authenticity and inclusiveness across generations.

The second pillar, Ethical Pedagogical Content Knowledge (EPACK), represents a transformation of the Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) concept, which has long been the global standard for teacher competency. EPACK strengthens the traditional PCK dimension, combining mastery of content and pedagogy with a foundation in Islamic ethics and digital skills grounded in moral responsibility (Mezza, 2022; Munawir, Rohmah, et al., 2025). This means that the ideal Islamic Religious Education teacher is not only adept at teaching in an engaging manner using interactive multimedia, but also maintains authentic meaning, avoids trivializing religious interpretations, and instills Islamic values through digital-based experiential learning. This concept is relevant to address the phenomenon of teachers whose technology is advanced but whose substance is shallow, or whose content is deep but whose technology and ethics are lagging behind.

The third pillar, Communal Reflective Practice, introduces the concept of collective self-reflection within the context of a professional teacher community. Instead of sporadic personal reflection, QPF develops a system of communities of practitioners (teachers' learning communities) that systematically reflect, supported by big data analytics to analyze the effectiveness of methods, interactions, and learning impacts. This model shifts the paradigm of "intuition-based" reflection to "data-based and spiritual accountability" reflection. This concept of communal-based digital self-reflection is a key pillar in building a professional culture that does not stop at teaching, but continues to move towards conscious, scientific, and ethical self-improvement.

The fourth pillar, Policy-Engaged Scholarship, presents a new paradigm shift in positioning Islamic Religious Education teachers not merely as policy implementers but as epistemic and intellectual actors directly involved in the formulation of Islamic education policy (Mahendra, 2021). Teachers are encouraged not only to participate in technical training but also to participate in policy hackathons, education advocacy forums, and the formulation of digital community-based Madrasah Work Plans. This pillar takes a critical stance against top-down approaches to education policy that often ignore teachers' field experiences. Thus, the QPF encourages the emergence of policy-active teacher professionalism as educators, reflective practitioners, and proactive policy intellectuals.

This model was tested through a pre-experiment in 10 leading madrasahs, with a pre-test and post-test scheme to measure its impact on three dimensions of professionalism: digital literacy, policy engagement, and the integration of Islamic values in pedagogy. The intervention was carried out through intensive educational technology training, community-based educational policy co-creation workshops, and collaborative lesson studies based on the integration of Islamic values. The results showed a significant, empirically measurable increase. There was a 42% increase in digital literacy as measured through a direct assessment of the use of technology in learning. Teacher involvement in the policy process also increased by 35%, including the development of digital madrasah work tools and participation in community-based advocacy. In addition, there was a 28% increase in the integration of Islamic values in lesson plans, classroom activities, and formative assessments that have been validated by the madrasah principal and external supervisors. These improvements are not only technical, but confirm that QPF is able to strengthen the epistemological identity of Islamic Education teachers without making digitalization a mere cosmetic project. These results confirm that multidimensional professionalism is the only effective way to address the pressures of digital disruption and educational reform. In addition to measuring teacher competency, follow-up research analyzed data from 500 students to examine the direct impact of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism on students' cognitive, spiritual, and ideological outcomes (Mezza, 2022; Sachs, 2003). Regression results showed a significant effect, with students experiencing a marked increase in spiritual literacy, strengthening their in-depth understanding and authentic religious experiences

(Muchith, 2018). Critical Islamic thinking skills also improved, confirming that teacher professionalism enables the learning process to move beyond mere memorization to the formation of transformative Islamic reasoning (Munawir, Rohmah, et al., 2025). Furthermore, resistance to radical ideology significantly strengthened, indicating that the higher the level of teacher professionalism, the lower the student's vulnerability to radicalization (Arif, 2023). This finding explicitly validates the relevance of transformative learning theory in modern Islamic education, Islamic Education teachers are not only teachers of knowledge, but agents of transformation of consciousness and guardians of the nation's ideological security.

Theoretical Synthesis and Policy Implications

This research, a synthesis of various empirical findings and multidimensional analysis using the Ecological and New Professionalism approaches, proposes a new framework called Postmodern Islamic Teacher Professionalism. This framework is designed to address the urgent need to develop Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism in the era of digital disruption, an era where changes in technology, learning culture, and contestation of religious discourse occur rapidly and non-linearly. This framework does not establish a dichotomy between religion and modernity, but consciously facilitates a constructive and creative dialogue between the two, so that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism is not uprooted from its epistemological identity, while remaining adaptive to the demands of the times. This paradigm is based on three fundamental principles that are interrelated and mutually reinforcing.

First, the principle of Epistemological Hybridity. This principle proposes that the entire process of developing Islamic religious education (PAI) teachers' professionalism must integrally integrate the two primary sources of knowledge in Islam: *naqli* (revelation-based knowledge) and *aqli* (rational-empirical knowledge). This means that the ideal PAI teacher in the modern era must not only be ritually pious or merely master classical texts, but must also possess analytical, reflective, and critical thinking skills regarding contemporary realities (Muchith, 2018). This paradigm rejects the dichotomous model that has traditionally separated religious knowledge from general knowledge, as the reality of today's education demands that both be brought together in the curriculum, learning strategies, and evaluation. PAI teachers are positioned not only as guardians of tradition, but also as engineers of Islamic intellectual civilization.

Second, the principle of Ethical Technocracy. At this point, the Postmodern Islamic Teacher Professionalism framework emphasizes that technology should not be positioned as a neutral instrument. Technology must be placed within an Islamic ethical framework based on the *maqasid sharia*—namely, the goal of sharia to safeguard religion (*hifz al-din*), reason (*hifz al-aql*), life (*hifz al-nafs*), descendants (*hifz al-nasl*), and wealth (*hifz al-mal*) (Arif, 2023). Islamic Religious Education teachers in the digital era are not simply “technologically literate,” but must be able to consciously and critically curate content, select platforms, and design digital learning experiences that strengthen students' morals and spirituality, not the other way around. This principle is important because field facts show the existence of misinformation, digital radicalism, and the commercialization of religion in online spaces that actually weaken the meaning of Islamic education if not ethically controlled (Munawir, Rohmah, et al., 2025).

Third, the principle of Communal Autonomy. In contrast to the highly individualistic Western model of professionalism, this paradigm positions the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education teachers as part of the collective responsibility of the Islamic scholarly community. Teacher authority stems not only from formal state certification but also from the legitimacy of the scholarly community through the *sanad* of knowledge and the practice of collective reflection (Mahendra, 2021). Thus, teachers' professional decisions should not be made solitarily or simply following bureaucratic administrative instructions, but must go through a process of congregation-based deliberation (communal reflective practice). This principle revives the traditions of *halaqah*, *mudhakarah*, and collective *ijtihad*, while simultaneously building an Islamic pedagogical culture that is democratic, contextual, and morally accountable to the community, not just to state regulations. Based on this conceptual framework, this study firmly concludes that future policies for developing Islamic Religious Education teacher professionalism must undergo a paradigm shift. Policy direction should no longer solely prioritize formal administrative standards such as training hours or structural certification, but rather prioritize ethical-communal accountability supported by the integration of the *maqasid sharia* and an Islamic pedagogical approach based on the continuous transmission of knowledge. The three strategic policy implications recommended by this research are as follows.

First, fundamental reform of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher certification system. The certification process should no longer focus solely on administrative indicators and diploma ownership, but must

utilize the Quadripartite Professionalism Framework (QPF). The QPF framework evaluates teacher professionalism more holistically, encompassing digital scientific pathways (*sanad*), the integration of technology ethics (EPACK), communal reflection practices, and teacher involvement in Islamic education advocacy and policy (Mahendra, 2021). This transformation is crucial to prevent pseudo-professionalism based solely on legal-formalism without in-depth values and practical capacity. Second, the establishment of Islamic Pedagogical Labs at LPTK (Institutions for Teachers and Teacher Training) and Islamic educational institutions. These labs serve as centers for pedagogical experimentation that ethically integrate Islamic values, cutting-edge educational research, and digital technology. Through these labs, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are not only trained in using technology but also guided in designing Islamic digital pedagogy that aligns with the *maqasid* of sharia and is relevant to the characteristics of Gen Z and Alpha (Muchith, 2018). These labs also serve as strategic innovation ecosystems that can create adaptive Islamic learning models for the future. Third, the integration of the scientific *sanad* dimension into the Teacher Performance Assessment (PKG) system. To date, PKG has overemphasized administrative output and student test scores. This study recommends that the dimension of scientific transmission, namely the authoritative continuity between teachers and the Islamic intellectual tradition, be established as a formal performance indicator for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. This integration ensures that professionalism is measured not only by technical skills but also by the continuity of the Islamic intellectual tradition and the teacher's commitment to legitimate scientific authority (Arif, 2023). This study confirms that the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers is the most strategic factor in navigating Islamic education in the era of globalization and digital disruption. Professional Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, within a postmodern framework, are those who are able to combine spiritual strength, intellectual intelligence, social reflection, and technological proficiency without losing the epistemological integrity of Islam. This professional approach has been proven to increase learning effectiveness, shape moderate Islamic character, and strengthen students' resilience against extreme ideological threats.

CONCLUSION

The professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers holds a strategic position as the vanguard in shaping a generation of Muslims with character, adaptability, and excellence in facing the complexities of modern civilization. This responsibility is not only moral and spiritual but also legal, as affirmed in the Teachers and Lecturers Law. However, the reality on the ground shows that there remains a serious gap between conceptual ideals and the quality of implementation. Some PAI teachers remain trapped in a normative and textual approach to knowledge transfer, unable to optimize the dimensions of value internalization, religious habitus, and the integration of digital technology in learning. Amid the rapid flow of digital information, PAI teachers are not only required to master Islamic material epistemologically, but also to possess adequate digital, social, and spiritual competencies to act as epistemic filters and agents of moderation. Without complete and sustained professionalism, students risk falling victim to extreme, intolerant narratives or non-authoritative religious information. Thus, PAI teachers must reposition themselves from mere teachers to architects of civilization, shaping a spiritual, critical, moderate, and humanistic educational ecosystem. A literature review shows that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism ideally encompasses three main domains: cognitive (mastery of knowledge and pedagogy), ethical (morals and value transmission), and socio-legal (scientific chain of command and structural responsibility). Professionalism should not be understood solely as technical skills, but rather as an intellectual and moral identity that is continuously renewed through continuing professional development (CPD). Therefore, strengthening Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism must be carried out systematically, structured, collaboratively, and visionarily, rather than in a partial or incidental manner. Only in this way can Islamic education make a real contribution to the formation of a civilized, tolerant, and globally competitive nation.

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