



## Evaluating Core Competencies of Islamic Religious Education Teachers: A Study at the Education Office of Sumedang Regency

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**Abstract:** This study aims to reveal the quality of Islamic Religious Education Teachers at the elementary and junior high school levels under the auspices of the Sumedang Regency Education Office, West Java, Indonesia. Using a mixed-method approach and data collection techniques such as in-depth interviews and questionnaires analyzed using NVivo software, it was found that the competencies of Islamic Religious Education teachers do not yet fully meet the expected standards. The research findings identified five main forms of competencies: personality, pedagogical, professional, social, and spiritual, with several aspects within each dimension that still need improvement. Exemplary behavior, innovative teaching methods, learning motivation, communication skills, and religious understanding emerged as the primary areas of weakness identified. This study recommends the need for more contextual and sustainable competency development strategies to enhance the overall quality of Islamic Religious Education teachers in line with contemporary challenges and the needs of students.

**Keywords:** evaluation standards; Islamic Religious Education; nation-building; teachers' competencies.

### Introduction

Education serves as a fundamental pillar in nation-building. The quality of education is significantly influenced by teachers' professional competencies and capabilities (Nurfatimah et al., 2022). In Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim country, Islamic Religious Education teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' character and moral development (Judrah et al., 2024). The rapid advancement of technology and information necessitates the continuous enhancement of teacher competencies to adapt to changing times (Sitompul, 2022).

The Minister of Religious Affairs, Nasaruddin Umar, in his speech during National Teachers' Day on November 25, 2024, emphasized that strengthening teacher competencies is imperative in the current era. Various training programs facilitating teachers' access to technology and the internet must be fully supported to help teachers face rapid societal changes while maintaining their identity as educators and moral guides (Zhao et al., 2024). Umar's statement aligns with the concept of "lifelong learning" as proposed by UNESCO. Lifelong learning is essential for developing adaptive skills in an increasingly changing and evolving world. In a globalized environment characterized by continuous advancement, individuals can no longer rely solely on knowledge and skills acquired during formal education. They must engage in continuous learning throughout their lives, as this transformative approach effectively addresses various global

challenges (Odell et al., 2020).

For teachers, lifelong learning encompasses various competencies as stipulated in Law No. 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers. Article 10, paragraph 1 specifies four competencies required of teachers: pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies. These competencies are essential for teaching effectively and supporting teachers in fulfilling their educational responsibilities (Smolikevych, 2019). Islamic Religious Education teachers must possess an additional competency—prophetic competence. Beyond the four mandatory competencies, Islamic Religious Education teachers must demonstrate the ability to provide religious guidance, such as delivering sermons or lectures to students and the general public. This requirement aims to enhance educational quality in Indonesia, particularly in Islamic Religious Education (Syahidin & Parhan, 2023). Therefore, to achieve this vision, Islamic Religious Education teachers, despite their established teaching status, must continuously improve all these competencies through lifelong learning. By continuing to learn and improve their competence, teachers' teaching abilities can also improve, one of which is in using learning media. From there, it will also have an impact on increasing student learning motivation, as research conducted by Hijriyah states that there is a significant relationship between the use of learning media and increasing student motivation (Hijriyah et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, empirical evidence indicates that teacher quality in Indonesia remains relatively low. According to National Education Ministerial Regulation No. 16 of 2007 on Academic Qualification Standards and Teacher Competencies, teachers meeting academic qualifications are those who have completed a minimum of S1/D4 education, in accordance with standards established by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. However, BPS education statistics from the 2024 report indicate that 97.33 per cent of teachers meet these qualifications, representing a 0.38 per cent increase from the previous year (Kraft & Christian, 2022). Despite this seemingly "high" percentage, approximately 50,000 teachers still lack the required qualifications, meaning they possess academic credentials below the S1 level (Donovan et al., 2022). This potentially explains why UNESCO's 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report ranked Indonesia's teacher quality 14th out of 14 developing countries (Agbedahin, 2019).

Additional data from the 2021 Teacher Competency Test reveals that approximately 81% of Indonesian teachers failed to achieve the established minimum score. Similarly, 2022 National Examination data showed that Indonesian teachers' average score was 54.6, below the minimum standard of 55. In the same year, results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) placed Indonesia 72nd among 79 participating countries, with an average score of 371, significantly below the OECD average of 487 (Kharismawati et al., 2024).

Beyond these statistics, research conducted in Jakarta revealed that among 60 teachers, 75% were assessed as unable to adequately prepare learning processes and tended to lose focus on learning objectives when designing and implementing classroom instruction. Contributing factors included not only competency deficiencies but also limited understanding of research methodology—70% of teachers did not comprehend problem formulation and research concepts, 90% had never conducted research, and 100% had no scientific publications related to research (Leonard, 2015).

This reality contradicts Regulation of the Minister of Administrative Reform and Bureaucratic Reform No. 16 regarding Teachers' Functional Positions and Credit Points, which requires teachers to conduct research and produce scientific publications as part of their responsibilities as scholars. According to Oemar Hamalik, teachers as scholars are not merely tasked with transferring knowledge to students but must also develop that knowledge, particularly through scientific research (Musthofa et al., 2023). Therefore, research and scientific publication should be integral components of teachers' professional responsibilities (Hammersley, 1993), as engaging in research enhances teacher quality and competencies, deepens understanding of student needs, and expands pedagogical knowledge (Cheruvu, 2014).

These data and research findings clearly demonstrate persistent issues regarding teacher quality and competencies in Indonesia. Islamic Religious Education teachers specifically face challenges in conducting learning evaluations and preparing teaching materials (Nashir & Salenda, 2020). These abilities should be well-mastered as essential components of teacher competencies as outlined in Law No. 14 of 2005.

Similar conditions exist among Islamic Religious Education teachers at elementary and junior high school levels in the Sumedang District Education Office. Preliminary surveys involving interviews and documentation studies at relevant institutions yielded the following data:

Table 1. Level of Education of Islamic Religious Education Teachers

| Education Level | Number of Teachers | Percentage |
|-----------------|--------------------|------------|
| S1 (Bachelor)   | 917                | 96.53      |
| S2 (Master)     | 33                 | 3.47       |
| S3 (Doctoral)   | 0                  | 0.00       |

Table 2. Employment Status of Islamic Religious Education Teachers

| Employment Status | Number of Teachers | Percentage |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Civil Servant     | 252                | 26.53      |
| Contract (PPPK)   | 164                | 17.26      |
| Non-Civil Servant | 534                | 56.21      |
| Total             | 950                | 100        |

Based on these tables, of the 950 Islamic Religious Education teachers at elementary and junior high school levels in the Sumedang District Education Office, 96.53% (917 teachers) hold bachelor's degrees, only 3.47% (33 teachers) have pursued master's degrees, and none have attained doctoral qualifications. This data suggests that the vast majority of teachers, almost all Islamic Religious Education teachers in the Sumedang District Education Office, have not continued their education beyond the initial bachelor's level. However, advancing to master's and doctoral programs represents one form of competency enhancement available to teachers (Brown, 2024).

Similarly, employment status data shows that more than half of the Islamic Religious Education teachers in the Sumedang District Education Office remain non-civil servants. Having a civil servant status provides teachers with greater opportunities for competency development, as stipulated in Government Regulation No. 17 of 2020, which states that civil servant teachers are entitled to develop their competencies annually through integrated learning approaches. Based on these conditions, the researchers hypothesized that the quality of Islamic education teachers at the elementary and junior high school levels in the Sumedang District Education Office needs to be reevaluated in order to improve its quality.

Lifelong learning, also known as lifelong education, is a topic that has become a hot topic in the world of education today, as predicted by Malcolm in 1980. This concept is very well known in the Western world and has become a crucial and important thing to do. From a Western educational perspective, lifelong learning is a continuous process aimed at supporting and empowering individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills, and understanding they need throughout their lives to apply in their future endeavors. Lifelong learning also means that it must be carried out at all stages of the life cycle and in all contexts of life as part of the continuous development of skills and knowledge (Laal & Salamati, 2012).

In terms of Islamic education, the concept of lifelong learning has been introduced for a long time by the Prophet Muhammad, long before education reached its current peak of advancement (Wawan, 2016). The obligation to seek knowledge for every Muslim then became a concept that continued to be studied, including by Imam Syafi'i. According to him, lifelong learning is a concept that every Muslim must learn from the moment they are born until they die,

and not be limited to formal institutions alone. Imam Syafi'i also explained that in its implementation, lifelong learning must include several elements, such as wisdom, diligence, perseverance, high aspirations, friendship with teachers, being carried out throughout one's life, piety, and good character (Din et al., 2018).

In line with the rapid development of the times and technology, the abilities and knowledge of individuals, especially teachers, are increasingly required to advance. Therefore, it is important for teachers to apply this concept, which is none other than to develop themselves so that they can keep up with social and technological change (Laal, 2012). In terms of self-development, the urgency of lifelong learning is to improve competence and broaden horizons. In relation to strengthening competencies through lifelong learning, there are several previous studies that discuss this topic.

In 2023, research at a school in Soppeng District indicated that Islamic Religious Education teachers had mastered theoretical curriculum and learning principles; however, teaching commitment, insufficient competency development training, and limited facilities remained persistent challenges requiring solutions (Jaya & Halik, 2023). The following year, 2024, research conducted at SDN 101600 Purbabangun concluded that efforts to enhance Islamic Religious Education teachers' competencies remained focused on strengthening learning content and conventional teaching methods. Although these teachers recognized the importance of mastering modern skills such as creativity, teamwork, and digital literacy in the teaching-learning process, they continued to encounter obstacles related to self-development opportunities, infrastructure availability, and school management support (N. Harahap, 2024).

That same year, another study conducted at SDN 034815 Singgabung found that strengthening Islamic Religious Education teachers' competencies was primarily achieved through three key strategies: technology-enhanced training, inter-educator collaboration, and character formation-oriented lesson plan development. However, limited duration and difficulty accessing quality training programs presented significant barriers (Maharaja, 2024). Research conducted at SMA Budisatrya Medan in 2024 revealed that Islamic Religious Education teachers' competencies at this institution encompassed essential aspects of educational competence, exemplary character, effective communication, and adaptability skills required in the contemporary era. Nevertheless, several obstacles were identified, including insufficient digital technology mastery hindering modern learning integration, the emergence of student behavioral issues due to inappropriate internet use complicating moral and social development, and demanding teaching schedules coupled with limited networking opportunities impeding professional growth (Dewi et al., 2024).

And most recently, in 2025, research on this issue was conducted at SDN 030429 Jambu, finding that pedagogical competency enhancement was primarily achieved through three strategies: professional development programs, teacher collaboration, and educational technology implementation. However, the study noted the absence of a continuous training system designed according to teachers' needs to support more optimal learning processes (A. Y. Harahap, 2025).

Research on the competencies of Islamic Religious Education teachers has been conducted extensively, particularly focusing on pedagogical development or teacher professionalism in general. However, most previous studies have placed teacher competencies within a normative or national policy framework without examining the actual conditions in the field contextually. Additionally, the lack of research that delves deeply into the quality of Islamic Religious Education teachers' competencies across the five dimensions—personality, pedagogical, professional, social, and spiritual—opens an important gap for qualitative studies rooted in the empirical experiences of teachers and local policymakers.

This study offers a new contribution by comprehensively mapping the quality of Islamic Religious Education teachers' competencies based on the five dimensions of competencies derived from in-depth interviews conducted within the Sumedang District Education Office. This study not only describes the current conditions but also identifies in detail the specific aspects that still need improvement in each competency dimension. These findings provide a more

contextual and applicable understanding, while also serving as a relevant foundation for developing targeted strategies to enhance the quality of Islamic Religious Education teachers based on real needs.

## Method

To answer the research objectives, this study was conducted by applying a mixed methodology. This methodology is a series of stages that combine qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques in one study. The combination of the two approaches aims to obtain a comprehensive understanding and solution to the problems being studied by researchers (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The research design used in this study adopted an exploratory sequential mixed methods design (Seggerman, 2024). The choice of this model is based on the research process being divided into two sequential stages, where the first stage applies a qualitative approach followed by the second stage using a quantitative approach.

Based on the research objectives, there were four parties who became participants in this research, namely 6 Islamic Religious Education Teachers at the Elementary and Junior High School levels, one person from the Sumedang Regency Education Office, and one person from the Ministry of Religion of Sumedang Regency. For the qualitative phase, researchers used a stratified random sampling technique, or determining research participants by dividing the teacher population based on strata/level, in this case the elementary and junior high school levels.

After conducting interviews with the 8 interviewees, the researcher conducted a quantitative phase using convenience sampling technique, which allows researchers to obtain data from subjects who are easily accessible and meet the necessary research requirements. Before the quantitative questionnaire was distributed, validity and reliability tests were first conducted using SPSS software, which produced data showing that all 12 items used in the instrument were valid and reliable from April to May 2025, 78 respondents volunteered to fill out Google Forms for this study.

## Results

After conducting in-depth interviews with a number of informants consisting of elementary and junior high school Islamic Religious Education teachers, as well as the Education Office and the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Sumedang Regency, various results were found that described the actual condition of the quality of elementary and junior high school Islamic Religious Education teachers' competencies in the Sumedang Regency Education Office. The interview data was analyzed using NVivo software, yielding key findings that categorize teacher competencies into five aspects: pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competencies—the four essential competencies that every teacher must possess—and spiritual competency, which is specifically required of Islamic Religious Education teachers.

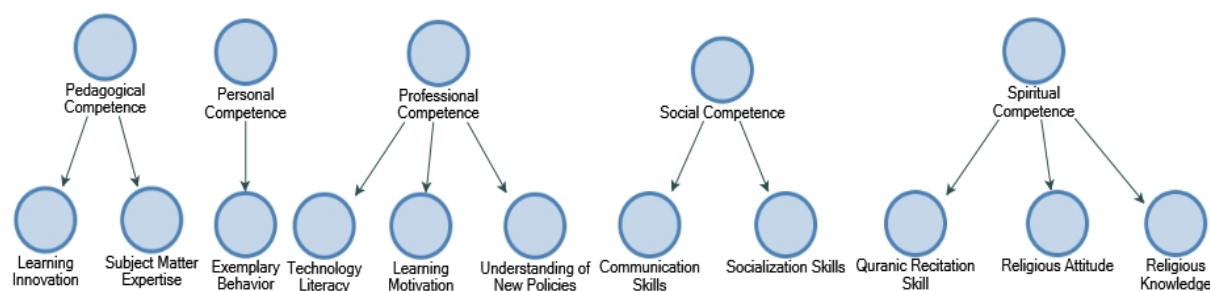


Figure 1. Map of Islamic Religious Education Teacher Competency

### Personal Competence: Exemplary Teaching Practices

In terms of personal competence, exemplary behavior is one of the competencies that the informants mentioned as needing to be improved by Islamic Religious Education teachers at the elementary and junior high school levels in the Sumedang District Education Office. This aspect of exemplary behavior is deemed important by the interviewee as part of a teacher's personality, particularly for Islamic Religious Education teachers. Attitudes, behavior, moral character, and even appearance are considered to influence a teacher's authority in the eyes of students and serve as a model for the school environment (Teacher5). In addition to the interview results, the need for improving personal competence is also supported by data from a Google Form filled out by 78 respondents, who stated that personal competence ranks third in terms of competencies that still need to be improved, after pedagogical and professional competencies, as shown in the following diagram.

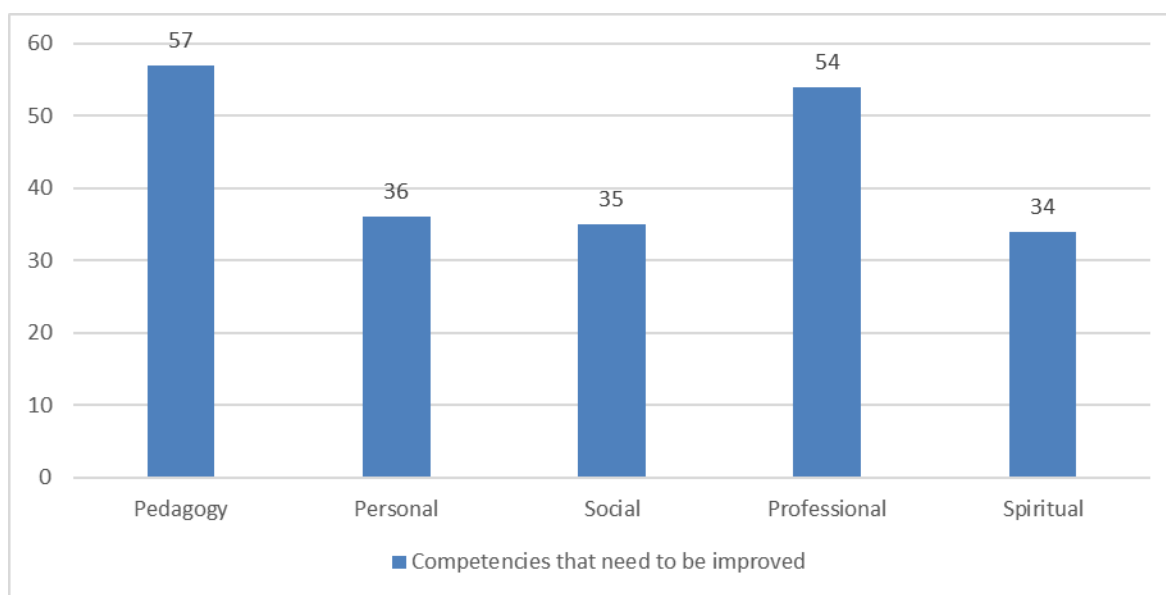


Figure 2. Diagram of Islamic Religious Education Teacher Competencies That Still Need Improvement Based on Google Form Results

From this data, it can be concluded that 36 teachers, or 46.2% of respondents, feel that there is still a need for improvement in the dimension of personal competence, especially in terms of exemplary behavior.

### Pedagogical Competence: Teacher Innovation and Scholarship in Learning

In addition to the exemplary attitude of Islamic Religious Education teachers as part of their personal competence, the interview results also show that pedagogical competence still needs to be improved. As seen in the previous diagram, pedagogical competencies are the most important competencies that need to be improved, according to 57 respondents or 73.1%, particularly in terms of learning innovation and academic knowledge. Learning innovation includes the creation of more engaging and interactive learning materials, as well as learning models that do not solely rely on conventional methods (Teacher4).

The importance of learning innovation is also related to students, so that they do not feel bored during learning, as stated by one of the informants: "Competencies related to learning must be updated and more creative so that students do not get bored. It should not just be dictated; pedagogical competencies must be improved so that learning models also have innovation" (Office1). In addition to educational innovation, academic knowledge is also one of the key pedagogical competencies that Islamic Religious Education teachers must enhance, as highlighted by the following interviewee:

"Personally, academic knowledge or pedagogy... Because if we enhance our academic

knowledge and understanding, the more we learn, the more we know. When we know more, we become wiser in taking actions, and this will significantly influence our teaching methods as well (Teacher3).”

### **Professional Competence: Teachers' Responses to Policy Dynamics and Motivation to Continue Learning**

After pedagogical competence, professional competence is the second competence that 54 respondents (69.2%) felt needed to be improved. In addition to the questionnaire data, the interview results also showed that professional competence still needed to be improved, particularly in three main aspects, namely understanding of new policies, learning motivation, and understanding of technology. Government policies related to education, which frequently change every year, whether in terms of curriculum or other technical changes, are not easily understood by all Islamic Religious Education teachers at the elementary and junior high school levels in the Sumedang District Education Office. Due to the unstable nature of these policies, some teachers still find it difficult to understand them, thereby weakening the quality of their professional competencies (Teacher2).

However, as stated by one of the sources, “...every year the policies can be different, and teachers must be able to follow every policy issued by the government, so it's not stagnant. But competence is something that can be learned... (Teacher3).”

Therefore, understanding these new policies has become one of the professional competencies of Islamic Religious Education teachers that needs to be improved.

The desire to understand and learn about these new policies is also related to teachers' motivation to learn, which is part of their professional competence that still needs to be improved. Although most Islamic Religious Education teachers in elementary and junior high schools in Sumedang Regency have appropriate educational backgrounds, there are still some teachers who are reluctant to return to learning because they are no longer young (Teacher6) or because they are nearing retirement (Teacher7). This is also emphasized by another source: “...but for teachers who are already quite old, the classic reason is that they don't feel the need to learn or improve their competencies anymore because they're about to retire, or they don't want to be far from home, so that's one of the challenges, making their competencies stagnant or static, not dynamic (Teacher1).”

Another source also stated that teachers' motivation to learn is low because they only want instant results, not a deep process (Teacher2). In fact, this motivation to learn is an important part of teachers' professional competencies that needs to be improved, as emphasized by the Education Office, which highlighted the low motivation for self-directed learning among some Islamic Religious Education teachers:

“...not all teachers are active, not all teachers are willing to learn on their own, because now through social media, through Zoom, not in person, while not all teachers have the same abilities, so generally they can, but not all teachers are diligent in seeking knowledge on their own... if they don't have the willingness, they will be lazy to seek new knowledge, but that's not possible, especially now with technology becoming more modern, if the teacher can't balance it... (Teacher8).”

The lack of professional competence among Islamic Religious Education teachers at the elementary and junior high school levels in the Sumedang District Education Office in terms of learning motivation is also evident from the results of the Google Form regarding plans to continue education.

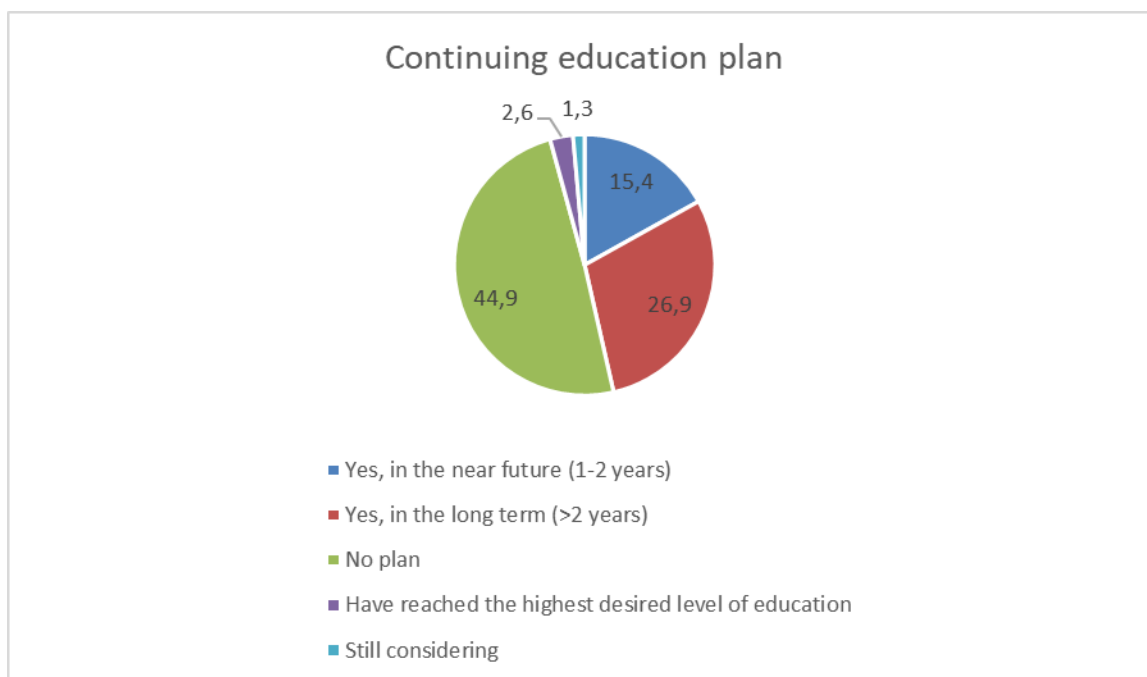


Figure 3. Diagram of Plans to Continue Education Based on Google Form Results

From the diagram above, it can be seen that 35 teachers or 44.9% of the total 78 respondents, have no plans to continue their education, while 7 teachers or 9%, feel that their current level of education is sufficient. Most of the respondents who selected these two options are at the bachelor's degree level, even though advancing one's educational level is one of the indicators of learning motivation for self-development, which is closely related to professional competence. This data reinforces the need for support to improve the quality of such competencies, not only from teachers themselves but also from the Education Office and the Ministry of Religion as the overseeing institutions.

In addition to these two aspects, another aspect of professional competence that still needs to be improved by Islamic Religious Education teachers at the Education Department of Sumedang Regency is their ability to understand technology. In an era where technology has become extremely important and everything requires technology, Islamic Religious Education teachers must also keep up with these developments. However, the reality is that there are still Islamic Religious Education teachers in the Sumedang District Education Office who lack understanding of technology, even though not only teaching but also promotions or simply accessing learning platforms for Islamic Religious Education teachers are now done online (Teacher5).

This is also reinforced by various opinions from informants who feel they still lack technological understanding, such as "I still want to improve my technological competence in teaching... (Teacher4)," or another informant who expressed a similar sentiment, "Well, maybe communication and IT skills (Teacher6)."

This lack of technological competence is undoubtedly due to the uneven capabilities of all teachers (Office8), especially older teachers, who tend to feel left behind by the technological advancements of today and find it difficult to catch up without high motivation to learn (Teacher7). Therefore, professional competence in understanding technology is one of the key aspects that should be prioritized in developing future competency enhancement programs, as what teachers currently need most is closely tied to knowledge and technology (Teacher1).

### Social Competence: Communication and Socialization Skills

The fourth competency that a teacher must possess is social competency. However, the findings reveal that the social competency of Islamic Religious Education teachers in the Sumedang District



Education Office is the fourth competency that still needs to be improved, based on the opinions of 35 respondents or 44.9%. There are two aspects of this competency that require special attention, namely communication skills and social skills.

As a teacher, especially an Islamic Religious Education Teacher who is often asked to speak in public, whether to give a lecture or simply communicate with the community, the ability to communicate in public should be a skill mastered well (Teacher5). However, on the ground, some sources stated that the quality of social competence, especially in terms of communication, still needs to be improved (Teacher6). This is as stated by one of the sources below.

“...because I have often been appointed as a speaker to fill events, conduct studies, and even had the opportunity to teach at the university level. Now, how I lead in a large-scale situation or how I lead an organization is what I want to improve, because when I host an event, influence is important. When I want teachers to do this or that, or implement programs like this or that, it can only be achieved if we become leaders. If I'm just in the curriculum department, I don't have the authority... (Teacher2).”

In addition to communication skills, social skills are also an aspect that still needs to be improved in terms of the social competencies of Islamic Religious Education teachers at the Sumedang District Education Office. Based on the interview results, it was found that the social skills of some Islamic Religious Education teachers are still considered to need improvement, particularly in terms of social interaction within the community. This was stated by one of the interviewees as follows:

“Yes, especially this way, for Islamic Religious Education, my hope was that when religious teachers were accommodated, their religious knowledge and social awareness could be well accommodated, but the fact is, as mentioned earlier, only some people were influenced, even because they lacked social competencies, so once their teaching duties were finished, socialization with the community was lacking (Teacher5).”

From these statements, it can be concluded that the expectation for Islamic Religious Education teachers at the Sumedang District Education Office to possess good public communication skills and socialization skills in the community as part of their social competencies has not been fully realized. This indicates that both aspects of social competencies remain challenges that need to be improved in quality as an important part of their role as educators.

### **Spiritual Competence: Internalization of Religious Values and Religious Practices of Teachers**

Finally, in addition to the four mandatory competencies for teachers, there are also competencies that must be possessed by Islamic Religious Education teachers, namely spiritual competence. This spiritual competence is also a competency that, according to 34 respondents or 43.6%, still needs improvement. Based on the interview results, there are several aspects that need to be improved in this spiritual competence, namely the ability to read the Qur'an, religious knowledge, and religious attitude.

One indicator of spiritual competency for Islamic Religious Education teachers is their ability to read the Quran well and correctly. However, the interview results indicate that this ability is not yet fully possessed by all Islamic Religious Education teachers. One of the informants said that there are still some Islamic Religious Education teachers who are not fluent in reading the Qur'an, even though this is a basic skill and a key competency that is not only required academically but also morally and socially in the community (Teacher5).

In addition to this skill, another aspect of spiritual competence that still needs improvement is religious knowledge. As with the previous pedagogical competency, where the scientific aspects of Islamic Religious Education teachers still need to be improved, so too does their religious knowledge. Moreover, this religious knowledge forms the basis for the spiritual competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers, which is very much needed both in teaching and in other tasks related to religion, as stated by one of the informants that “...especially as a religious teacher, one must have a lot of religious knowledge” (Teacher5).

Still related to this, another key component needed by Islamic Religious Education teachers is

a religious attitude reflected in their daily personalities. However, from the interview results, it was found that the personalities of Islamic Religious Education teachers were not yet fully demonstrating strong religious values. This was revealed by a source's statement, "...in general, I see that in terms of personality, it is the same..." (Teacher3).

This statement indicates that there is no significant difference between Islamic Religious Education teachers and other teachers in terms of personality, even though, as religious educators, Islamic Religious Education teachers should be able to set an example of religious attitude in the school and community. A personality closely tied to religious values should also be a distinctive characteristic of Islamic Religious Education teachers, both in terms of ethics, morality, speech, and social interaction. Therefore, this spiritual competency is a competency that needs to be improved, considering its importance for Islamic Religious Education teachers, who are closely related not only to religious knowledge but also to their attitudes and behavior in daily life.

## Discussion

Research findings on the quality of Islamic Religious Education Teachers' competencies indicate that there are still teachers who face challenges in fulfilling all aspects of competencies comprehensively, including the four mandatory competencies, namely personal, pedagogical, professional, and social competencies, as stipulated in Permendiknas No. 16 of 2007, as well as additional competencies for Islamic Religious Education teachers, namely spiritual competencies (Marjuah et al., 2023).

Based on the research findings, the personal competencies of Islamic Religious Education teachers at the Sumedang District Education Office do not yet fully reflect the ideal educator, particularly in terms of exemplary behavior. This is evidenced by the fact that there are still Islamic Religious Education teachers who, in their daily lives, do not fully embody the moral and spiritual values that should serve as a model for students and the surrounding community. This finding highlights the gap between the ideal role of an Islamic Religious Education Teacher and the practices observed in the field. As stated by (Zalsabella et al., 2023) exemplary behavior is a key component of personal competence because teachers are representative figures of moral values in education, encompassing aspects of attitude, behavior, and professional ethics.

Another opinion explains that good personality is not only measured by words but also by concrete actions that can serve as examples for students, both inside and outside the classroom (Cahyaningrum et al., 2017). This exemplary behavior directly impacts the formation of students' character and serves as the foundation for building trust from students, parents, and the broader community. In fact, teachers who can serve as role models are more effective in guiding and instilling values in students on an ongoing basis (Okeke, 2024).

The lack of quality in personal competence theoretically indicates a conceptual imbalance between the ideal educator who serves as a role model and their daily behavior. When teachers cannot be ideal role models, not only is the learning process disrupted, but the values that should be internalized in students are also neglected (Wardhani & Wahono, 2017). This also implies the need for continuous training to improve teachers' exemplary attitudes, emphasizing moral values and noble character.

In addition to personal competence, the research results also indicate that the pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers in the Sumedang District Education Office still needs attention to improve its quality. This competence plays a central role as it reflects the professional capacity of teachers to manage effective and adaptive learning in accordance with the needs of students (Lubis, 2018). However, the findings indicate that aspects of pedagogical competence, such as learning innovation and scientific knowledge of Islamic Religious Education teachers, still need to be improved in terms of quality.

In terms of learning innovation, the research results show that many Islamic Religious Education teachers still conduct conventional learning without meaningful innovation, both in terms of media, methods, and learning models. However, pedagogical competence includes teachers' innovation in making the learning process more engaging and aligned with students' needs

(Agus, 2009). Such innovation can make students more active and enhance their learning motivation (Faizin et al., 2023).

Research findings highlight that there are still Islamic Religious Education teachers who tend to be monotonous and do not actively involve students in their learning processes. This indicates that these teachers have not yet mastered pedagogical competencies well, as pedagogical competencies require teachers to design learning that is not only engaging but also effective (Kosim & Subhi, 2016), both in terms of strategies and methods that can involve students in the learning process.

The lack of innovation in learning in pedagogical competence is also related to scientific aspects, which are also an important focus in the findings of this study. The scientific aspects in question are not limited to mastery of Islamic Religious Education material alone, but also include an understanding of the dynamics of educational development and learning methodologies. This is important because teachers are expected not only to be conveyors of material but also responsive facilitators of learning in line with the changing times (Faizin et al., 2023).

However, this finding shows that some Islamic Religious Education teachers in the Sumedang District Education Office do not yet have sufficient scientific knowledge, which implies a gap between the pedagogical theory of teachers who demand learning innovation and high scientific knowledge, and the reality of conventional practices. Ideally, teachers who master pedagogical competencies will be able to make the learning process more engaging, effective, and aligned with the characteristics of students, and this naturally requires sufficient academic knowledge (D. Prayoga, 2019). This theoretical gap then implies the need for continuous strengthening of teachers' competencies in pedagogy, particularly in these two aspects.

Another competency that is equally important to improve, in addition to the two competencies mentioned above, is professional competency. This is important, as academic capacity and the sustainability of teacher development can be reflected in the dimensions within it (Rahimah, 2021). According to the findings of this study, there are three main aspects that are highlighted: understanding of new education policies, motivation to continue learning, and mastery of technology.

Changes in education policy are not uncommon, and they can occur annually or with each leadership transition. However, this finding reveals that some Islamic Religious Education teachers in the Sumedang District Education Office still face difficulties in understanding these new policies. Yet, understanding new policies is an important indicator of competence, as professional teachers are those who can adapt to all changes, identify them, and then create and adjust their teaching methods to remain relevant (Hakim, 2024). If teachers cannot understand and adapt to these changes, the substance of the material being taught will not be conveyed effectively and efficiently (Nurtanto, 2016).

To understand new policies well, a teacher must continue to learn and have high motivation. However, the reality on the ground shows that some teachers do not have sufficient motivation to continue learning, one example being their choice not to pursue higher education. This finding indicates a lack of intrinsic motivation to develop oneself as an educator. In fact, according to a study, learning motivation is the primary driver in supporting lifelong learning (Shamshinar & Azhan, 2022).

Lifelong learning itself is important, not only for Islamic Religious Education teachers but for every Muslim, as there are numerous commands in the Qur'an and hadith to continue learning and seeking knowledge, such as in Surat Al-Mujadalah verse 11, Taha verse 114, Ali Imran verse 7, and various other evidences (Rachman & Muallif, 2024). For a teacher, lifelong learning serves as a bridge to enhance competencies (Laal & Salamati, 2012) and expand the knowledge required for teaching (Artacho et al., 2020). This also serves as a form of self-development for teachers and improves their quality as professional educators (Muchith, 2016).

Meanwhile, in terms of technology mastery, the findings indicate that many teachers still experience difficulties in using technology, both in learning and in improving their competencies. This is inconsistent with the ideal concept of professional competency mastery for teachers, where

a professional teacher should be able to integrate technology into the learning process (Arasyiah et al., 2020) and enhance their own professionalism (Helmi, 2021).

This skill is increasingly crucial for teachers to master, given the increasingly sophisticated and diverse developments in technology. A lack of technological proficiency can result in learning that is less responsive to the needs of the times (Subroto et al., 2023). One international education organization, UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), even emphasizes the importance of teachers mastering technology to deliver interactive lessons and cater to the various learning styles of students (Hüfner, 2010).

Findings on the three aspects of professional competence indicate that teachers' understanding of policies, motivation to learn, and mastery of technology at the Education Office of Sumedang Regency are still not optimal. Theoretically, this reinforces the view that teacher professionalism is not only determined by academic qualifications but also by the willingness to continue learning, adapt to system developments, and embrace technology (F. I. Prayoga et al., 2024). This condition then implies the importance of more concrete institutional interventions, such as effective policy socialization programs, technology training based on direct practice, and participatory and sustainable teacher learning motivation coaching.

The next competency that needs to be improved by Islamic Religious Education teachers at the Sumedang District Education Office is social competency. These social competencies are important as a foundation for building healthy and meaningful relationships with students, colleagues, parents, and other school community members (Husna et al., 2021). However, the findings indicate that the communication and socialization skills of Islamic Religious Education teachers are still not optimal.

A teacher's communication skills are not only measured by their willingness to speak but also by their ability to convey ideas systematically and present those ideas using a communication style appropriate to the characteristics of the audience, particularly students (Chen et al., 2021). In this context, communication is not merely a technical skill but also an integral part of the pedagogical process that supports the achievement of learning objectives (Wahrudin & Mukhibat, 2017). For Islamic Religious Education teachers, this ability is even more crucial, as they are sometimes asked to give lectures not only to students but also to the general public (Tuna, 2022). In fact, the informants revealed that this ability has not been mastered well by all Islamic Religious Education teachers in the Sumedang District Education Office, making it one of the aspects that requires special attention. This is quite vital, considering that this skill is also a sign of social intelligence that teachers, especially Islamic Religious Education teachers, must possess (Surbakti et al., 2024).

The same thing also happens with socialization skills, namely that Islamic Religious Education teachers at the Sumedang Regency Education Office are not yet able to socialize well, especially with the community in their surroundings. This is an essential point of focus, as teachers' involvement in communities across various environments not only creates a more supportive educational environment but also helps students achieve better academic performance (Parnawi, 2018). Furthermore, teachers' good social skills with their surroundings can also aid students' development in enhancing their empathy and concern for others (Santos, 2020).

The lack of these two abilities is part of teachers' social competencies, theoretically implying that strengthening the socialization abilities of Islamic Religious Education teachers cannot be separated from the concept of social intelligence, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction between individuals in the education system. Teachers, as part of this system, must be able to establish healthy and collaborative relationships and communication with various parties, which in turn influence the quality of the educational process and outcomes (Arfandi & Samsudin, 2021). Practically, this requires training focused on developing social skills, such as interpersonal communication training, social emotion management, and collaborative activities among teachers. Thus, improving social skills not only impacts teachers' interpersonal relationships but also contributes to creating an inclusive, supportive, and conducive school climate for students' overall development.

In addition to these four mandatory competencies, Islamic Religious Education teachers must also possess prophetic competence, also known as spiritual competence or prophetic competence. This competence refers to the teacher's ability to create a religious environment, not only in learning but also in daily life, including when leading religious worship (Yulianto & Darmawan, 2024). This competency is important for Islamic Religious Education teachers to have, as it is a fundamental part of reflecting their religious integrity (Razak et al., 2021). However, the facts on the ground show that there are still several aspects of spiritual competency that need to be strengthened, such as the ability to read the Qur'an, religious knowledge, and religious attitude.

In terms of the ability to read the Qur'an, some Islamic Religious Education Teachers at the Sumedang District Education Office still face limitations in tajwid and fluency in reading. This situation is quite concerning, as the Qur'an is the primary source in Islam, and this competency should be an absolute foundation for Islamic Religious Education Teachers (Anam et al., 2023). This ability is essential, not only technically, but also in terms of the credibility and authority of teachers as religious guides for students (Harianto & Kandedes, 2023).

Similarly, religious knowledge is also a fundamental aspect for an Islamic Religious Education teacher. However, findings reveal that there are still Islamic Religious Education teachers in the Sumedang District Education Office who do not fully understand the basic concepts of Islamic teachings comprehensively. This lack of religious knowledge can lead to rigid, non-contextual learning that fails to address the social realities faced by students (Putri & Kholik, 2024). In fact, teaching materials should be mastered well and accompanied by an integrative understanding so that teachers are able to relate Islamic values to the dynamics of life (Yousef et al., 2024).

From the aspect of religious attitude, the research results also show that the daily behavior of Islamic Religious Education teachers in the Sumedang Regency Education Office is not in line with the Islamic values they teach. This indicates that there is still a gap between the religious characteristics that should be present in an Islamic Religious Education Teacher, such as asceticism, piety, sincerity, honesty, fairness, humility, courage, and patience, and the reality on the ground (Lutfi, 2017). If this quality is not improved, the education provided will not be optimal because religious attitudes themselves are a tangible form of living values education (Aziz et al., 2023).

This finding theoretically reinforces the importance of an integrative approach in developing the competencies of Islamic Religious Education teachers, as the spiritual dimension is the main foundation in shaping the character of a complete educator (Nasution & Masyithoh, 2024). Teachers' weaknesses in their ability to read the Qur'an, religious knowledge, and religious attitudes reflect a gap between scientific and spiritual identities that should be integrated within Islamic Religious Education teachers. Practically, this requires more substantial ongoing training, such as *tahsin* training, contextual Islamic studies, and programs to strengthen religious attitudes through religious activities in the school environment.

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that the quality of Islamic Religious Education teachers' competencies at the elementary and junior high school levels in Sumedang Regency is still varied and not yet fully ideal. This is evident from the shortcomings in several aspects, such as the aspect of exemplary behavior in personal competence, the aspect of innovation in learning and scholarship in pedagogical competence, the aspect of understanding new policies, learning motivation, and mastery of technology in professional competence, the aspect of communication and socialization skills in social competence, as well as the aspect of the ability to read the Qur'an, religious knowledge, and religious attitude in spiritual competence.

This finding theoretically reinforces the importance of a holistic approach in teacher competency development, emphasizing that teacher competencies must be developed integrally by combining all existing competency dimensions (Chiu et al., 2024). It also reinforces the importance of the concept of lifelong learning, namely that professional teachers are those who continue to learn and adapt to changes in the times (Gündüz, 2023). Meanwhile, practically, the results of this study serve as an important basis for schools and related institutions to design teacher competency

development programs that are not only administrative but also substantial, contextual, and sustainable. This research contributes to mapping the actual condition of Islamic Religious Education teachers' competencies in the Education Office of Sumedang District, thereby serving as an academic and policy reference for improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education teachers in elementary and junior high schools.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the quality of Islamic Religious Education teachers' competencies at the elementary and junior high school levels in the Sumedang District Education Office generally still shows a gap between ideal expectations and reality in the field. Although teachers have the basic competencies required by regulations, certain aspects, such as exemplary behavior in personal competencies, innovation and mastery of subject matter in pedagogical competencies, as well as learning motivation and policy adaptation in professional competencies, still require strengthening. Similarly, in social and spiritual competencies, some teachers have not demonstrated adequate public communication skills and religious understanding commensurate with their role as religious role models.

These findings indicate that strengthening teacher competency quality is not sufficient through administrative approaches or formal assessment procedures alone, but must be accompanied by professional reflection and systemic support. Teacher competency is not merely something to be possessed but must be consistently and contextually practiced. Therefore, these results underscore the urgency of ongoing professional development that addresses the actual needs in schools and encourages Islamic Religious Education teachers to continue growing in integrity, pedagogical capacity, and spiritual depth as religious educators.

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