



## THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION TEACHERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCY AND CHARACTER BASED LEARNING METHODS

Elsa Salsabila<sup>1</sup>, Salsabila Anita Firdaus<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Al-Azhar University, Gresik, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta, Indonesia

[elsagresik0402@gmail.com](mailto:elsagresik0402@gmail.com)<sup>1</sup>, [salsabilaanitafirdaus@gmail.com](mailto:salsabilaanitafirdaus@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>

\*Corresponding author email: [salsabilaanitafirdaus@gmail.com](mailto:salsabilaanitafirdaus@gmail.com)

---

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran strategis guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) dalam pengembangan metode pembelajaran berbasis kompetensi dan karakter di era kurikulum merdeka. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi literatur yang mengkaji ulang jurnal ilmiah, buku referensi, dan artikel akademik melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan dengan teknik triangulasi sumber. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa guru PAI memiliki tiga dimensi peran strategis: pedagogik (merancang pembelajaran inovatif), spiritual (menginternalisasi nilai islam), dan sosial-etika (membentuk karakter digital). Metode pembelajaran inovatif yang efektif mencakup *Project-Based Learning*, *Problem-Based Learning*, dan *Inquiry-Based Learning* yang mengintegrasikan keterampilan abad ke-21 dengan pembentukan karakter religius. Implementasi pembelajaran berdiferensiasi melalui diferensiasi konten, proses, produk dan lingkungan terbukti meningkatkan motivasi dan partisipasi siswa. Keberhasilan pembelajaran PAI berbasis kompetensi dan karakter ditentukan oleh sinergi antara inovasi metode, integrasi teknologi dengan nilai Islam, dan profesionalise guru, karena ketiga elemen ini membentuk ekosistem pembelajaran holistik yang menjembatani tradisi nilai keislaman dengan tuntutan kompetensi global.

**Kata Kunci:** Guru PAI; Kurikulum Merdeka; Pembelajaran Berbasis Kompetensi; Pembelajaran Berdiferensiasi; Pendidikan Karakter.

---

### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to analyse the strategic role of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in developing competency-based and character-based learning methods in the era of independent curriculum. This study uses a qualitative method with a literature study approach that reviews scientific journals, reference books, and academic articles through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing using source triangulation techniques. The results of this study indicate that PAI teachers have three dimensions of strategic roles: pedagogical (designing innovative learning), spiritual (internalising Islamic values), and socio-ethical (shaping digital character). Effective innovative learning methods include Project-Based Learning, Problem-Based Learning, and Inquiry-Based Learning, which integrate 21st-century skills with religious character building. The implementation of differentiated learning through differentiation of content, process, product, and environment has been proven to increase student motivation and participation. The success of competency- and character-based PAI learning is determined by the synergy between methodological innovation, the integration of technology with Islamic values, and teacher professionalism, as these three elements form a holistic learning ecosystem that bridges Islamic values with global competency requirements.*

**Keywords:** Character Education; Competency-Based Learning; Differentiated Learning; Merdeka Curriculum; PAI Teachers.

---

---

*How to cite:* Salsabila, E., & Firdaus, S. A. (2026). The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in the Development of Competency and Character-Based Learning Methods. *Al-Hikmah: Jurnal tarbiyah dan Ilmu Keguruan*, 06(01), 9-22.

---

## INTRODUCTION

Education in the modern era faces various challenges that are increasingly complex and complicated in line with the advancement of globalisation, digitalisation, moral degradation, and social change. The era of globalization has had a significant impact on the openness of information and culture, which is not always in line with Islamic values. (Yani & Purwidiyanto, 2024) These challenges not only affect the learning process but also the role of teachers as educators of values and morals amid rapid social change. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia has undergone a significant paradigmatic transformation in the last two decades, particularly in response to the demands of 21st-century learning and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. These changes are not merely administrative in nature but require a fundamental reconfiguration of the learning approach that integrates the development of academic competencies with the formation of students' religious character. As a subject that has unique characteristics in instilling Islamic values while developing critical thinking skills, PAI is in a strategic position in shaping a generation of Indonesian Muslims who are not only intellectually intelligent but also strong in faith and noble character (Hoeruman et al., 2025).

In facing the challenges that arise in the realm of Islamic education, the role of PAI teachers is very important in the learning process. PAI teachers are not only tasked with transferring Islamic knowledge, but also serve as key figures in instilling character and shaping students' morals so that they are able to face negative influences in the modern era. However, the reality in the field shows that there are still many PAI teachers who are not fully prepared to face the dynamics of the times, both in terms of teaching methods, use of technology, and strategies for internalising Islamic values in students' daily lives (Sulaiman et al., 2023) . Therefore, several appropriate strategies are needed so that PAI teachers can perform their roles optimally in facing modern educational challenges, including the importance of information and communication technology competencies to improve the effectiveness of the learning process at the primary school level.

The implementation of competency-based and character-based Islamic Education (PAI) learning faces three complex challenges that require strategic responses. First, the development of digital technology and the flow of globalisation have brought ambivalent impacts providing broad access to information and innovative learning media, but also presenting threats of negative content, cyberbullying, and moral degradation that require PAI teachers to have adequate digital literacy to guide students in using technology wisely. Second, the diversity of student characteristics requires the implementation of differentiated learning that accommodates differences in learning readiness, interests, and learning styles, in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasises student-centred learning (Musbaing, 2024) Third, the integration of 21st-century skills requires a significant pedagogical reorientation, PAI teachers must transform from information deliverers to facilitators who encourage students to think critically, creatively, collaboratively, and communicatively through innovative methods such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, and technology-based learning. (Kusumardi, 2024)

In the context of PAI learning transformation, teachers have a strategic, multidimensional role that cannot be replaced by technology or other learning resources. The role of PAI teachers in the 21st century has shifted from instructors to facilitators, motivators, and mentors who help students construct knowledge, develop skills, and internalise Islamic values (Judrah et al., 2024) . As key agents of change in education, PAI teachers are not only responsible for transferring knowledge, but also equipping students with 21st-century skills, including digital literacy, technology ethics, and social-emotional skills (Achadah & Mulyati, 2020) .

The professionalism of PAI teachers is a key factor in the success of competency-based and character-based learning. Teachers' pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies have a significant influence on the formation of students' character (Asmadi et al., 2022) . In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, PAI teachers are required to have the ability to develop differentiated learning that takes into account the diversity of students, including differentiation of content, process, products, and learning environments tailored to students' learning readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Sulaiman et al., 2024) . PAI teachers also play an important role in integrating technology into learning, utilising multimedia, digital platforms, and interactive learning media to facilitate the development of students' digital literacy (Musbaing, 2024) .

The development of innovative learning methods is essential in efforts to achieve quality PAI learning that is relevant to the demands of the 21st century. Project-Based Learning (PBL) is one of the most effective methods for simultaneously developing students' competencies and character, encouraging them to work together to solve real problems, develop creativity, and produce meaningful products (Busnawir et al., 2025) . Technology-based learning has also become an increasingly important innovative method, with the use of interactive learning media such as learning videos, simulations, gamification, and digital learning platforms that can increase students' motivation and understanding of PAI material (Sulaiman et al., 2023) . However, innovative learning methods will not be effective without adequate teacher competence, making continuous professional training and development an urgent necessity.

Although there have been many studies examining PAI learning, teacher competence, and innovative learning methods, there are still research gaps that need to be bridged. First, studies that comprehensively analyse the strategic role of PAI teachers in developing competency- and character-based learning methods are still limited, as most studies tend to focus on one aspect without integrating it into a holistic study. Second, the implementation of differentiated learning in PAI still faces obstacles, ranging from uneven understanding of concepts, limitations in teachers' skills in designing differentiated learning, to challenges in conducting appropriate assessments. Third, the integration of technology in PAI learning is still partial and has not been systematically integrated into learning design, making it important to conduct studies on best practices and evaluate their effectiveness in achieving competencies and character building. Fourth, studies on the role of PAI teachers in the context of 21st-century learning need to be strengthened with a more contextual approach through in-depth qualitative or mixed-method methods that are capable of capturing the complexity of PAI learning practices in the field and providing a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of learning and the strategic role of teachers in transforming learning.

Based on these research gaps, this study aims to: (1) analyse the strategic role of PAI teachers in developing competency- and character-based learning methods; (2) identify the competencies required by PAI teachers to implement innovative learning methods; (3) describe effective innovative learning methods; (4) explore strategies for implementing differentiated learning; and (5) formulate strategic recommendations for the professional development of PAI teachers. The novelty of this research includes an integrative and holistic approach, contextualisation with the Merdeka Curriculum, a focus on differentiated learning in PAI, exploration of the integration of technology and character values, and a 21st-century skills perspective (6Cs: *Critical Thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, Citizenship, and Character*) in PAI learning.

By filling existing research gaps and offering novelty in its approach and focus, this research is expected to make a significant theoretical and practical contribution to the development of PAI learning in Indonesia. Theoretically, this research enriches the scientific knowledge based on competency- and character-based PAI learning. Practically, this research provides strategic guidance for PAI teachers, curriculum developers, and education policymakers in designing and implementing quality, innovative PAI learning that is relevant to the demands of the 21st century.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilised a literature review method (*library research*), which is an approach that involves collecting and analysing various reference sources relevant to the topic under discussion. ( The data used were sources such as scientific journals, reference books, and academic articles discussing the role of PAI teachers, the development of competency- and character-based learning methods, and the implementation of effective learning strategies in the context of Islamic Religious Education. The data sources in this study consisted of two categories, namely primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include academic journals that specifically discuss the strategic role of PAI teachers in designing and implementing learning methods, competency-based learning approaches, and strategies for shaping Islamic character through religious education. Meanwhile, secondary sources include reference books, scientific articles, and research reports that discuss in general the pedagogy of Islamic Religious Education, competency-based learning theory, and character education from an Islamic perspective. (Sugiyono, 2018)

The data analysis method used in this study was descriptive analysis, which was carried out in three main stages. (Miles et al., 2014) The first stage was data reduction, which was the process of selecting and filtering information from various literature so that only data relevant to the role of PAI teachers and the development of competency-based and character-based learning methods was retained. The second stage is data presentation, which is organising the information that has been collected into a systematic description so that it is easier to understand and analyse. The final stage is drawing conclusions, which is interpreting the results of the analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the strategic role that PAI teachers can optimize in developing learning methods that are oriented towards achieving student competency and character building. To ensure the validity of the data in this literature study, the source

triangulation technique was used, which involves comparing various references from different sources to see the consistency of the information obtained. (Moleong, 2012)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Strategic Role of PAI Teachers in Developing Competency- and Character-Based Learning

Islamic Education (PAI) teachers have a central and strategic role in shaping two fundamental dimensions of students, namely academic competence and religious character. In the context of learning in the 21st century, the teaching paradigm has undergone a significant transformation from a conventional *teacher-centred* approach to a student-centred approach. With this paradigm shift, PAI teachers are no longer positioned solely as conveyors of information, but as active facilitators and inspirers who guide the learning process holistically. (Chumaidi, 2025) In carrying out this role, PAI teachers integrate three essential functions that are closely interrelated. First, the educational function, which focuses on developing knowledge and intellectual skills. Second, the inspirational function, which arouses motivation and enthusiasm for learning through exemplary behaviour. Third, the moralistic function, which instils noble moral values and shapes spiritual awareness. These three functions work synergistically to prepare students to face various complex challenges in an era of globalisation and digitalisation that demands adaptive abilities and moral resilience from students. (Vernando et al., 2024)

In line with the implementation of the independent curriculum, the role of PAI teachers is further emphasised through the mission of fostering Pancasila-based students who are faithful, devoted to God Almighty, and have noble character. Within this framework, PAI learning cannot be separated from two complementary approaches, namely *competency-based learning*, which emphasises the mastery of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and *character-based learning*, which prioritises character building and moral integrity. These two approaches are organically integrated through a value-based learning process that is relevant to real life. (Putri et al., 2025) Empirical evidence shows that the competence of PAI teachers has a direct impact on the character formation of students. Rohmah's (2023) research reveals the important finding that PAI teachers who have high pedagogical and spiritual competence are able to significantly build the religious character of students. More specifically, teachers who are able to deliver value-based and spiritually-enriched learning have been proven to enhance various positive character traits such as empathy, honesty, and social responsibility in students. These findings emphasise that the quality of teachers is not only measured by their mastery of subject matter, but also by their ability to internalise Islamic values in students. (M. L. Rahman et al., 2023)

Furthermore, the role of PAI teachers is dynamic and contextual, adapted to the cognitive and moral development levels of students at various levels of education. At the primary school level, teachers serve as key figures who model the development of basic worship and moral habits. At this stage, learning emphasises the formation of a spiritual foundation through habit formation and direct role modelling. Meanwhile, at the junior high school (SMP) and senior high school (SMA) levels, the role of teachers transforms into that of reflective mentors who foster awareness of values and develop critical thinking skills

regarding contemporary moral issues. ( At this level, students are encouraged to analyse ethical issues from a deep Islamic perspective. Based on a comprehensive analysis of the latest literature, the role of PAI teachers in competency- and character-based learning can be synthesised into three main interrelated dimensions:

- a. Pedagogical Dimension: Designing and implementing innovative learning experiences to foster literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking skills essential for 21st-century life.
- b. Spiritual Dimension: Instilling and internalising Islamic values as moral guidelines that guide behaviour and decision-making in daily life.
- c. Social-Ethical Dimension: Shaping students who are capable of behaving religiously and with noble character in the context of a digital life full of challenges and moral temptations. (Yansyah et al., 2024)

## 2. Innovation in Competency- and Character-Based Learning Methods

Current innovations in learning methods are not only changing the way material is delivered, but are fundamentally transforming the learning process to be more meaningful, contextual, and oriented towards holistic competency development. The three most prominent and proven effective learning approaches include Project-Based Learning (PjBL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), and Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL), all of which integrate competency orientation with character building. Project-Based Learning (PjBL) opens up vast opportunities for students to engage in authentic learning through collaboration in solving real problems relevant to their social and religious lives. (Fithri et al., 2025) According to Kurniawan (2020), this approach places students as active agents who design and execute meaningful projects. Examples of implementation include creating a zakat literacy campaign involving research and public communication, producing da'wah videos that integrate technology and creativity, or organising mosque-based social activities that develop leadership and empathy. Such activities not only foster creativity and technical skills but also shape social responsibility and concern for others.

In addition to PjBL, the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach plays a crucial role in facilitating students to solve contemporary moral and social problems through an Islamic perspective. This approach begins with the presentation of problematic situations that challenge students to think reflectively and analytically. Examples of implementation include in-depth discussions on digital ethics in the use of social media, case studies on academic honesty and plagiarism, or exploration of environmental issues from the perspective of Islamic teachings on *khalifah fil ardh* (stewards of the earth). ( Through a process of investigation and collaborative discussion, students learn to analyse the complexity of problems, consider various perspectives, and make decisions that are in line with Islamic values.

The Inquiry-Based Learning (IBL) method also contributes significantly to building students' intellectual curiosity and systematic reasoning skills. In this approach, PAI teachers act as facilitators who encourage students to research and explore Islamic topics in depth and independently. Students can investigate themes such as the history of Islamic civilisation and its contribution to the development of science, or analyse muamalah law (Islamic economic transactions) in the context of the modern economic system. (Arlina et al., 2023) Overall, a synthesis of various studies shows that innovative learning methods

based on projects, problems, and discoveries have a significant multidimensional impact. The four main impacts are:

- a. Increasing student engagement in the learning process through meaningful learning experiences that are relevant to their lives.
- b. Simultaneously fostering religious and social character through practical experiences that integrate Islamic values with real actions.
- c. Improving higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and creativity, which are essential for dealing with the complexities of modern life.
- d. Integrating Islamic values into daily life so that learning is not merely theoretical but becomes a practical guide for action and decision-making. (Asmadi et al., 2022)

### 3. Integration of Technology and Islamic Values in PAI Learning

The rapid development of information and communication technology brings transformative opportunities as well as complex challenges for PAI learning at all levels of education. On the one hand, technology offers various possibilities to improve learning effectiveness through interactive media, broad access to information, and flexibility in the learning process. On the other hand, technology also presents the risk of moral degradation, abuse, and addiction if not managed with strong ethical values. ( In this context, PAI teachers are expected to be able to transform themselves into digital educators who not only master technology technically but are also able to integrate it with Islamic values to form ethical digital literacy. As stated by Nurkayatin et al. (2024), the use of technology without strengthening spiritual values can lead to various forms of moral degradation. Phenomena such as the spread of hoaxes, cyberbullying, social media addiction, and consumption of negative content are clear evidence of the dangers of technology without an ethical foundation. (Therefore, Islamic Education teachers have a crucial role to play in integrating fundamental Islamic values such as amanah (responsibility), ihsan (kindness and excellence), and social responsibility into every digital activity of students. This integration is not merely an addition, but a foundation that makes technology a means of positive empowerment. Through this integrative approach, students not only learn to use technology technically, but also develop critical awareness and moral responsibility in interacting in the digital world. (Mahesa et al., 2025)

The integration of Islamic values and technology can also be optimised through the implementation of a hybrid learning model (blended learning) that synergistically combines the advantages of online and offline learning. In this model, PAI teachers can utilise digital platforms to provide additional learning materials, personal spiritual reflection assignments, or interactive quizzes that can be completed flexibly. ( Meanwhile, face-to-face learning sessions focus on direct interaction, which is essential for character building, worship practices, and the development of a supportive learning community. The combination of these two modalities maximises learning effectiveness by leveraging the strengths of each approach. To effectively implement the integration of technology and Islamic values, PAI teachers need to master three complementary aspects of digital competence, namely:

- a. Technical Competence: The ability to operate, utilise, and adapt various digital learning applications and platforms in accordance with pedagogical needs and student characteristics.

- b. Ethical Competence: The ability to instill and model Islamic values in every digital activity, so that technology becomes a means of character building rather than merely an instrumental tool.
- c. Pedagogical-Digital Competence: The ability to design meaningful, interactive, and character-building digital learning experiences by integrating effective pedagogical principles. (Hunaidah & Ikmal, 2023)

Thus, the integration of technology in PAI learning is not merely the modernisation of tools or the digitisation of materials, but rather a representation of a more fundamental paradigm shift. The concept of digital spiritual literacy emerges as a new framework that positions technology as a means of forming adaptive, critical, and responsible Islamic character. ( In this paradigm, students are not merely passive consumers of technology, but become wise and productive users who are able to utilise technology for the good of themselves, society, and civilisation in accordance with maqasid syariah (the objectives of Islamic law).

#### 4. Implementation of Differentiated Learning at Various Levels of Education

The concept of differentiated learning has become one of the fundamental pillars of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasises recognition and appreciation of the uniqueness of each learner. This paradigm rejects the one-size-fits-all approach that treats all students uniformly ( ) and instead advocates adjusting learning based on the diversity of learner characteristics. In the context of PAI learning, teachers are required to have sharp diagnostic skills to understand differences in learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic), variations in interests and talents, and students' readiness levels, so that the learning process becomes more inclusive, meaningful, and effective. (Koimah et al., 2024)

Although the concept of differentiated learning promises significant improvements in learning quality, its implementation in the field still faces various substantive obstacles. These obstacles indicate the need for systematic support through training, mentoring, and the provision of adequate resources. However, empirical evidence shows that when differentiated learning is implemented with thorough understanding and preparation, the impact is very positive and significant. ( This improvement occurs because students feel that learning is designed according to their needs, abilities, and interests, so they are more engaged and have a sense of ownership of their own learning process. This strategy is designed to meet the diverse needs of students, improving their learning experiences and outcomes. The following section outlines this strategy.

- a. Content Differentiation: Teachers provide a variety of learning materials tailored to students' cognitive abilities and learning readiness. For example, students with high abilities can be given tasks to analyse hadiths using a critical approach to sanad and matan, while beginner students focus on understanding the literal meaning of verses and the context in which they were revealed. This approach ensures that each student is challenged in accordance with their proximal development zone. (Furqon & Nugraha, 2024)
- b. Process Differentiation: Teachers design a variety of learning activities and ways for students to process information, such as group discussions for students who learn through social interaction, simulations and role-playing of worship practices for

- kinesthetic learners, personal reflection through spiritual journals for introspective learners, or visualisation of concepts through mind mapping for visual learners. This diversity of processes accommodates various learning styles and multiple intelligences.
- c. **Product Differentiation:** Students are given the freedom to choose the form of output or final product of learning that suits their strengths and preferences. Options may include creating a video sermon that integrates technology and public speaking, designing infographics about Islamic values that train visual creativity, writing reflective essays that develop critical thinking and written expression skills, or giving oral presentations that train communication skills. This flexibility allows students to demonstrate their understanding in the most optimal way.
  - d. **Environmental Differentiation:** Teachers create and manage conducive, safe, and inclusive learning spaces, both physically and virtually. This includes flexible seating arrangements, providing learning corners with different functions (discussion areas, quiet areas for reflection), using accessible digital platforms, and building a classroom culture that values diversity and encourages collaboration. This supportive environment forms the foundation for the effectiveness of other differentiation strategies.

The systematic and sustained implementation of differentiated learning has proven to have an impact that goes beyond academic achievement alone. This approach inherently develops an inclusive character in students, as they learn to appreciate the diversity of abilities and contributions of each individual. Furthermore, differentiated learning fosters social awareness and empathy, as students experience first-hand that everyone has different strengths and needs (Kusumardi, 2024). In the context of Islamic education, this philosophy of differentiation is very much in line with the fundamental principle of *rahmatan lil alamin* (mercy for all creation), which emphasises education as a process that fosters compassion, respects the diversity of human nature, and facilitates the optimal development of each individual according to the unique potential bestowed by Allah SWT.

## **5. Strengthening the Professionalism of PAI Teachers in the Digital Transformation Era**

The professionalism of PAI teachers is a key pillar and determining factor in the success of competency- and character-based learning in the era of digital transformation. Professional teachers are not only individuals who have a deep mastery of teaching materials, but also figures who have the ability to innovate creatively, adapt quickly to technological developments, and have a strong moral commitment to their profession and the mission of Islamic education. ( This professionalism is multidimensional and requires continuous development in line with the dynamics of the times and the demands of contemporary education. The professionalism of PAI teachers can be operationalised through four main aspects of competence that are interrelated and form a holistic unity:

- a. **Pedagogical Competence:** The ability to design creative, innovative, and contextual learning by integrating various modern learning methods, optimally utilising technology, and adjusting strategies to the characteristics and needs of students. This competence includes comprehensive assessment skills, the ability to differentiate learning, and mastery of active learning strategies that empower students.

- b. **Personal Competence:** Exemplary behaviour and moral integrity that make teachers role models for students. This competence is not only about theoretical knowledge of Islamic values, but the real manifestation of these values in teachers' daily behaviour. This exemplary behaviour is very powerful because students learn more from what they see than what they hear.
- c. **Social Competence:** The ability to communicate effectively and build positive relationships with various education stakeholders, including students, parents, fellow teachers, and the community. This competence also includes deep empathy for the conditions and challenges faced by students, so that teachers can provide appropriate and personalised support.
- d. **Professional Competence:** Comprehensive and in-depth mastery of religious knowledge, contextual understanding of developments in science and technology, and reflective ability to continuously evaluate and improve teaching practices. This competence requires teachers to be lifelong learners who proactively update their knowledge and skills. (Hasan et al., 2025)

This collaborative approach is invaluable because it allows teachers to share experiences, discuss challenges, and learn from the best practices of their peers in a safe and supportive context. In addition to collaborative programmes, action research activities have also proven to be a powerful strategy for teacher professional development. Through action research, teachers systematically reflect on their own teaching practices, identify areas for improvement, design interventions, implement them, and evaluate their impact. This cycle of reflection-action-evaluation encourages teachers to continuously innovate and improve the quality of learning. (Ervina et al., 2025) Furthermore, involvement in research also develops an inquiry mindset and evidence-based decision-making in pedagogy.

Thus, strengthening the professionalism of PAI teachers is not merely an individual development need, but a fundamental national strategy for building an Islamic education system that is superior, adaptive to changing times, and globally competitive. Professional PAI teachers are the heart of change that bridges the legacy of noble Islamic values with modern learning innovations and technology. They are agents of transformation who guide the younger generation to become people of faith, knowledge, and noble character, capable of contributing positively to human civilisation in accordance with Islam's mission as *rahmatan lil alamin*.

## CONCLUSION

Educational transformation in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum and the challenges of globalisation have placed Islamic Education Teachers (PAI) in a very strategic position. Their role has fundamentally shifted from being mere *instructors* to facilitators, motivators, mentors, and role models who are fully responsible for developing the academic competence and internalising the religious character values of their students. This multidimensional role requires significant strengthening of competencies, including pedagogical, personal, social, and professional mastery, with a special emphasis on information and communication technology (ICT) competencies that are essential for facilitating learning in the 21st century. An effective and innovative learning method is differentiated learning, which is a necessity to accommodate

the diversity of students' readiness and learning interests, as well as the application of models such as *Project-Based Learning* (PjBL) and *Problem-Based Learning* (PBL), which have proven to be relevant and superior in training 4C/6C skills. The adoption of digital technology in PAI, through LMS platforms, interactive quizzes, and other digital media, not only increases effectiveness but is also a crucial medium for the development of students' digital literacy.

The success of implementing competency-based and character-based learning is largely determined by a comprehensive character-building strategy that integrates a habit-forming approach (consistent practice) with the exemplary behaviour of Islamic Education teachers as *role models*. The learning process and internalisation of values must be measured through holistic and authentic assessments that focus not only on cognitive aspects, but also include affective and psychomotor assessments (such as religious practices and religious project portfolios). To ensure that Islamic Education teachers are professionally prepared to face these complexities, continuous professional development is needed, focusing on training in differentiated learning implementation, technology integration *workshops*, and strengthening collaborative forums such as the Subject Teacher Working Group (MGMP). By implementing these strategic recommendations, the quality of PAI learning will improve, producing a generation of Indonesian Muslims who are not only intelligent but also resilient in character and ready to face global challenges while adhering to Islamic values.

Based on these findings, strategic recommendations are needed to ensure the professionalism and effectiveness of PAI teachers. First, the professional development of PAI teachers must be optimised through continuous training programmes that focus on the implementation of differentiated learning and the integration of digital technology in Islamic content. Second, educational institutions and policy makers need to ensure the availability of adequate learning technology infrastructure to support digital integration in PAI. Third, it is recommended to develop contextual practical guidelines for PAI teachers in applying differentiated learning and developing authentic assessment instruments that measure character and competence holistically. Finally, strengthening collaboration among PAI teachers through Subject Teacher Working Groups (MGMP) and professional practice communities needs to be facilitated to share good practices and support each other in implementing innovative learning.

## REFERENCES

- Achadah, A., & Mulyati, E. D. (2020). The Role of PAI Teachers in Increasing Student Motivation in PAI Subjects. *Al-Fikri: Journal of Islamic Education Studies and Research*, 3 (2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.30659/jspi.v3i2.15559>
- Alfi, A. M., Febriasari, A., & Azka, J. N. (2023). The Transformation of Islamic Education Through Technology. *Religion: Journal of Religion, Society, and Culture*, 2 (4), Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.55606/religion.v1i4.249>
- Aripin, A. M., & Noviani, D. (2025). Integration of Technology in Islamic Religious Education Learning: Opportunities and Challenges. *El-Mujtama: Journal of Community Service*, 5 (1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.47467/elmujtama.v5i1.5625>

- Arlina, A., Ramadhan, M. R., Pohan, N., Mandasari, D., & Nurhasanah, N. (2023). Application of Inquiry Strategies in Islamic Religious Education. *ANWARUL*, 3 (5), 888–898. <https://doi.org/10.58578/anwarul.v3i5.1418>
- Asmadi, Syah, M., & Yasa, A. (2022). The Impact of Islamic Education Teachers' Professionalism on Student Character Building. *Jurnal Ilmiah Edukatif*, 8 (1), 38–48. <https://doi.org/10.37567/jie.v8i1.1213>
- Aziiz, G. V. A., Romelah, & Mardiana, D. (2024). The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Increasing Students' Spiritual Intelligence at Mi Muhammadiyah 1 Probolinggo City. *AULADUNA: Journal of Islamic Basic Education*, 11 (2), 204–216. <https://doi.org/10.24252/auladuna.v11i2a8.2024>
- Busnawir, B., Yuniawati, I., Mardiaty, M., & Sitepu, E. (2025). The effectiveness of project-based learning in developing 21st century skills. *Darussalam: Journal of Psychology and Educational*, 4 (1), 35–50. <https://doi.org/10.70363/djpe.v4i1.272>
- Chumaidi, M. I. (2025). The role of PAI teachers as facilitators in increasing student active involvement in learning. *Jurnal Inovasi Global*, 3 (8), 1244–1253. <https://doi.org/10.58344/jig.v3i8.393>
- Ervina, E., Fitri, D. R., Barokah, F., & Sari, Z. (2025). Classroom Action Research in the Perspective of Teacher Professionalism: A Theoretical Study and Its Implications. *Multidisciplinary Indonesian Centre Journal (MICJO)*, 2 (3), 2685–2692. <https://doi.org/10.62567/micjo.v2i3.903>
- Fithri, Q. A. A., Soraya, I., & Hamdani, A. S. (2025). The Development of 21st Century Skills Through Project-Based Learning (Pjbl) With A Contextual Approach In PAI Learning. *Inteligensi: Journal of Education*, 7 (2), 40–55. <https://doi.org/10.33366/ilg.v7i2.6386>
- Fitri, A., Adriani, M., & Sari, H. P. (2024). The Essentialism Approach in the Implementation of Problem-Based Learning in Islamic Education. *IHSANIKA: Journal of Islamic Education*, 2 (4), 270–275. <https://doi.org/10.59841/ihsanika.v2i4.1929>
- Furqon, Z., & Nugraha, M. S. (2024). Differentiated Learning Strategies in Islamic Education to Meet the Needs of Heterogeneous Students. *An-Nawa: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 6 (1), 41–52. <https://doi.org/10.37758/xg0j0v91>
- Haidar, G. A., & Maulani, H. (2025). The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Building Student Character in the Digital Age. *IHSAN : Journal of Islamic Education*, 3 (1), 234–241. <https://doi.org/10.61104/ihsan.v3i1.606>
- Hasan, S., Bazith, A., Wakka, A., & Assegaf, A. R. (2025). Optimising the Teaching Skills of Islamic Education Teachers Based on Professional and Pedagogical Competencies. *Journal of Gurutta Education*, 3 (2), 58–68. <https://doi.org/10.33096/jge.v3i2.1792>
- Hoeruman, M. R., Mudore, S. B., & Sari, A. N. (2025). Islamic Education in the Era of 21st Century Learning. *Dialektika: Journal of Islamic Education*, 3 (2), 35–46. <https://doi.org/10.35905/dialektika.v3i2.12707>

- Hunaidah, M., & Ikmal, I. H. (2023). The Urgency of Teachers' Digital Competence in PAI Learning at SMK NU Lamongan. *Urwatul Wutsqo: Journal of Education and Islamic Studies*, 12 (2), 164–178. <https://doi.org/10.54437/urwatulwutsqo.v12i2.983>
- Judrah, M., Arjum, A., Haeruddin, H., & Mustabsyirah, M. (2024). The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Building Student Character: Efforts to Strengthen Morality. *Journal of Instructional and Development Researches*, 4 (1), 25–37. <https://doi.org/10.53621/jider.v4i1.282>
- Koimah, S. M., Zahra, N. A., Prasitini, E., Sasmita, S. K., & Sari, N. (2024). Implementation of Differentiated Learning to Meet the Diverse Learning Needs of Students. *Indonesian Journal of Social and Cultural Sciences*, 2 (2), 58–66. <https://doi.org/10.61476/49j96838>
- Kusnanu, D. S., & Rasyid, A. M. (2024). Implementation of Differentiated Learning on the Quality of the Learning Process in Islamic Education Subjects for Grade XI Students at MAN 1 Bandung. *Bandung Conference Series: Islamic Education*, 4 (1), 188–197. <https://doi.org/10.29313/bcsied.v4i1.11688>
- Kusumardi, A. A. (2024). Management of Differentiated PAI Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum at SMKN 1 Bakam. *Scientia: Journal of Research Results*, 9 (1), 16–30. <https://doi.org/10.32923/sci.v9i1.4493>
- Mahesa, E., Hidayat, S., & Gusmaneli, G. (2025). The Role of Islamic Education Teachers in Shaping Student Character in the Digital Age. *TSAQOFAH*, 5 (4), 3565–3578. <https://doi.org/10.58578/tsaqofah.v5i4.6399>
- Mahfudah, S. N., Munawir, M., & Fitriyah, Z. (2025). The Professionalism of Islamic Education As a Pillar of Character Education in the Era of Globalisation. *Atta'dib Journal of Islamic Education*, 6 (1), 17–34. <https://doi.org/10.30863/attadib.v6i1.8684>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd Edition). Sage.
- Moleong, L. J. (2012). *Qualitative Research Methodology*. Rosdakarya.
- Musbaing, M. (2024). PAI Teacher Competencies in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities in Technology-Based Education. *Reflection Education Journal*, 13(2), 315–324.
- Nurkayatin, W., Yani, M. T., & Sya'dullah, A. (2024). The Impact of Technology on Moral and Religious Values in Early Childhood. *Inspiration World: Journal of Education and Language Research*, 3 (3), 46–52. <https://doi.org/10.58192/insdun.v3i3.2235>
- Putri, S. V., Putri, S. V., & Gusmaneli, G. (2025). The Influence of Learning Design on PAI Learning Achievement and Student Character. *JOURNAL OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (JUPENDIS)*, 3 (1), 138–146. <https://doi.org/10.54066/jupendis.v3i1.2785>
- Rafly, M., Rahminawati, N., & Alhamuddin. (2025). The Effectiveness of the Differentiated Learning Model in Islamic Education Subjects to Increase Learning Interest in Grade

- VIII of SMPN 27 Bandung. *Bandung Conference Series: Islamic Education*, 5 (2), 373–380. <https://doi.org/10.29313/bcsied.v5i2.18664>
- Rahman, F. A., Latipah, S., Hafipudin, H., Nulhakim, I., & Sutiawati, S. (2023). Implementation of the Blended Learning Model in Islamic Education Lessons for Grade 7 at SMP PGRI 7 Kota Bandung. *Permata: Journal of Islamic Education*, 4 (2), 271–285. <https://doi.org/10.47453/permata.v4i2.1264>
- Rahman, M. L., Mufron, A., & Yeni, Y. (2023). Personality Competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Teachers in Shaping the Character of Students. *AL-WIJDĀN Journal of Islamic Education Studies*, 8 (3), 396–404. <https://doi.org/10.58788/alwijdn.v8i3.2330>
- Setiawan, A. A., Johan. (2018). *Qualitative research methodology*. CV Jejak (Jejak Publisher).
- Sugiyono. (2018). *Qualitative Research Methods* (3rd ed.). Alfabeta.
- Sulaiman, S., Maulana, M. I., & Amirudin, A. (2023). Challenges and Efforts of PAI Teachers in the Era of Globalisation and the Industrial Revolution 4.0 at SMP NU Babakan Gebang. *Permata: Journal of Islamic Education*, 4 (2), 183–195. <https://doi.org/10.47453/permata.v4i2.1210>
- Sulaiman, S., Munirah, M., & Paida, A. (2024). Independent Curriculum Differentiated Learning in Indonesian Explanatory Texts in Grade VII SMPSN 4 Pallangga. *OPSearch: American Journal of Open Research*, 3 (8), 228–237. <https://doi.org/10.58811/opsearch.v3i8.132>
- Vernando, T. O., Junaidi, I., & Fadriati. (2024). Optimising the Role of PAI and Character Education Teachers in Shaping Students' Religious and Moral Character in the Digital Age. *Mauriduna: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 5 (2), 698–707. <https://doi.org/10.37274/mauriduna.v5i2.1254>
- Yani, D. A., & Purwidiyanto, P. (2024). The Role and Challenges of Islamic Education Teachers in the Era of Globalisation. *Tambusai Education Journal*, 8(2), 29505–29511.
- Yansyah, M. E. J., Pahrudin, A., Jatmiko, A., & Koderi, K. (2024). Competency-Based Curriculum Transformation in Islamic Religious Education: Preparing a Character-Based Generation in the Digital Age. *Journal of Basic Education*, 15 (2), 361–372. <https://doi.org/10.21009/jpd.v15i2.49826>