

Analysis of Teachers' Specific Readiness in An In-Depth Approach to Islamic Education Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the specific readiness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in implementing the deep learning approach within the Independent Curriculum. The main issue addressed in this study is the gap between teachers' mastery of religious content (*tafaqquh fiddin*) and their ability to design innovative pedagogical strategies that encourage inquiry-based learning, such as projects on Religious Moderation. This research employs a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. The participants of this study were 12 PAI teachers from several senior high schools in Tanah Datar, West Sumatra. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques. The findings show that teachers who successfully implement deep learning approaches are those who are able to negotiate their professional identity between maintaining religious traditions and acting as agents of pedagogical innovation. These teachers are capable of integrating the authority of religious texts with students' critical experiences in the learning process. The study highlights the importance of strengthening Subject-Specific Teacher Readiness and Spiritually-Engaged Pedagogical Reasoning in order to support authentic teacher readiness in Islamic education.

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Keywords:

Deep Learning;
Independent Curriculum;
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INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum that prioritizes *a deep learning approach* has placed Islamic Religious Education Teachers (PAI) in a challenging position in the midst of Indonesia's religious community. The theory of *educational change* explains that the success of curriculum innovation is highly dependent on the readiness of teachers as the spearhead of implementation (Fullan, 2021). The phenomenon can be seen in various schools, such as in several high schools in Tanah Datar, where PAI teachers are required to design inquiry-based "Religious Moderation" projects, but the majority are still confined to traditional lecture and memorization methods. Sociological analysis of education shows that the pressure to change the teaching paradigm often clashes with old habits and social structures in the school environment (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2022). In contrast, the technocratic approach assumes that this problem can be addressed solely with technical skills training (Desimone, 2020). Therefore, the analysis of the readiness of PAI teachers must take into account the complexity of the social realities in which they operate.

Teacher *readiness* for an in-depth approach is influenced by a constellation of interrelated internal and external factors. The systematic review identified three main pillars: pedagogical-content competence (PCK), *self-efficacy*, and systemic support from the school environment (Gess-Newsome, 2023). For example, a study of teachers in Singapore shows that a strong mentoring program can increase teachers' confidence in applying complex pedagogy. These findings strengthen the *social cognitive theory* that places self-efficacy as a critical mediator between knowledge and action (Bandura, 2020), in (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2021). On the other hand, the perspective of *ecological systems theory* emphasizes that macro factors such as national policies and community culture have a decisive influence (Bronfenbrenner, 2021). In conclusion, readiness is a multidimensional construct that requires a holistic approach in its study.

The core problem lies in the dissociation between the mastery of deep religious content (*tafaqquh fiddin*) and the mastery of the innovative learning methodologies required for *deep learning*. The *Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge* (TPACK) framework emphasizes that optimal integration between content knowledge, pedagogy, and technology is the key to teaching effectiveness in the digital age (Mishra & Koehler, 2023). In practice, many PAI teachers are proficient in interpreting Qur'anic verses about social justice, but have difficulty designing role-play simulations that trigger students' critical analysis of inequality in the surrounding environment. This situation reflects the weakness of PAI's *specific Pedagogical Content Knowledge* (PCK), which is the ability to transform religious knowledge into a meaningful learning experience (Shulman, 2020). By comparison, traditionalists argue that exemplary (*uswah hasanah*) and the delivery of correct content are more important than methods (Al-Attas, 2021). However, the demands of contemporary education affirm that these two aspects must go hand in hand.

There is a significant research gap between the large number of general studies on *deep learning* and in-depth studies that analyze the construction of PAI teacher readiness in a specific and contextual way. The dominant literature tends to discuss *deep learning* from the perspective of curriculum design or student learning outcomes, while the readiness aspect of special subject teachers such as PAI is still neglected (Jensen & Sonnemann, 2022). A review of publications related to Islamic education in the last five years shows that less than 10% focus on the pedagogical capacity of teachers in responding to curriculum innovations. *This gap is* crucial because the epistemology and unique learning objectives of PAI—touching the cognitive, affective, and spiritual realms—require a distinctive configuration of teacher competencies (Hashim & Rahman, 2023). On the other hand, cross-subject research argues that generic pedagogical competencies can be transferred (Hattie, 2022). However, the peculiarities of content and values in PAI demand a more in-depth and distinctive exploration.

The *Subject-Specific Teacher Readiness* (SSTR) theory provides a solid foundation to address these gaps by emphasizing that teacher readiness must be conceptualized

within the framework of the characteristics of the discipline being taught (Grossman & McDonald, 2023). This theory develops from *Pedagogical Content Knowledge* (PCK) which emphasizes the unique form of knowledge that teachers have about how to teach certain content to certain students. For example, the readiness of PAI teachers to facilitate critical discussions about *ijtihad* requires not only an understanding of fiqh, but also the ability to create psychologically and theologically safe scenarios for students to think independently. This analysis is in line with the concept of *signature pedagogies* which states that each discipline has a distinctive way of shaping a mindset (Gurung et al., 2020). Comparative theories such as *the generic pedagogical approach* consider universal teaching principles to be more important than content specialization (Marzano, 2021). However, to achieve the depth of learning in PAI, understanding the peculiarities of religious content is an irreplaceable foundation.

Based on initial observations, the author formulates a grounded theory proposition that the readiness of PAI teachers to face *deep learning* is formed through the *dialectical process of identity* between the role as a *transmitter of tradition* and the role as an *agent of change*). This proposition arises from a pattern in which PAI teachers often experience a tension between the obligation to convey established doctrine and the demands to build a critical and reflective classroom climate. Qualitative studies in some madrassas show that teachers who successfully implement *project-based learning* are those who are able to engage in creative negotiations between textual authorities and student experience authorities. This pattern is in accordance with *the theory of teacher identity negotiation* which sees teacher identity as something fluid and continuously formed through social interaction (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2022). Alternative theories of developmental psychology see this phase as a natural stage in professional growth (Day & Gu, 2021). However, the tentative conclusion is that the success of navigation in this dialectic becomes the main determinant of the level of readiness.

Demands become particularly significant because PAI learning does not only aim to develop students' cognitive understanding of Islamic teachings but also seeks

to cultivate affective and spiritual dimensions that shape students' character and moral behavior. However, several studies and classroom observations indicate that the implementation of PAI learning in many schools is still dominated by conventional lecture methods, where students tend to be passive recipients of information and opportunities for inquiry-based learning remain limited. This situation creates a gap between the expectations of the Independent Curriculum and the realities of classroom practice. Therefore, it is important to examine the readiness of PAI teachers in implementing deep learning approaches that can support meaningful, reflective, and student-centered learning processes.

The relevant categories of theories can be classified into three domains: teacher knowledge theory (PCK, TPACK), motivation and change theory (Self-Efficacy Theory, CBAM), and context theory (Systems Ecology, Instructional Leadership). To advance the analysis, the author proposes an integrative framework called *Integrated Readiness for Deep Learning in Islamic Education* (IRD-LIE). This framework not only maps competencies (*can do*) but also investigates *beliefs* (*beliefs*), identities, and enabling ecological conditions (*enabling conditions*). A comparative study with the development of Moral Education teachers in Malaysia shows that approaches that integrate skills training with reflection on core values are more successful (Malaysia MOE, 2023). This synthesis is based on a paradigm of *wise practice* (*phronesis*) that emphasizes contextual ethical considerations in professional actions (Biesta, 2022). Meanwhile, *competency-based* approaches often ignore complex affective and contextual dimensions (Paniagua & Istance, 2021). Therefore, IRD-LIE is proposed as a more comprehensive and humane lens.

A relevant recent theory is *Spiritually-Engaged Pedagogical Reasoning* (SEPR), which explores how religious teachers integrate spiritual, ethical, and pedagogical considerations in designing deep learning. This theory responds to the rampant discussion about holistic education and the importance of *character education* in responding to the crisis of the times. SEPR argues that PAI teachers who are ready are not only skilled in choosing methods, but also able to carry out *ethical and spiritual discernment*—considering the impact of learning on the development of

students' souls (*tazkiyatun nafs*) (Sahin, 2024). This argument is supported by research on *contemplative pedagogy* that shows the benefits of deep reflection practices in learning (Zajonc, 2023). Instead, a rigorous *evidence-based practice* approach may question the existence and measurability of this spiritual dimension (Slavin, 2022). Thus, the readiness of PAI teachers in the contemporary era must also include the ability to reason pedagogically with deep spiritual awareness.

Based on a thorough exposure of social reality to the latest theories, it becomes increasingly clear that the analysis of PAI teachers' readiness for *deep learning* is a complex, contextual, and urgent study. The synthesis shows that the challenges are multidimensional, encompassing aspects of technical competence, conflicts of professional identity, and demands to harmonize pedagogical progress with the richness of Islamic scientific traditions. The research gaps that have been mapped require analytical approaches such as the *proposed Subject-Specific Teacher Readiness* (SSTR) and *Integrated Readiness for Deep Learning in Islamic Education* (IRD-LIE) frameworks to understand these complexities in their entirety. The grounded theory proposition of identity *dialectics* finds its relevance in the narrative of teachers' struggles in the field. Therefore, this article concludes that improving the quality of PAI learning in the era of the Independent Curriculum must start from serious efforts to understand and build authentic teacher readiness, by respecting them as subjects who have scientific authority and struggle at the forefront of educational transformation.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative approach with a phenomenological study design to explore the readiness of PAI teachers in applying the *deep learning* approach. The theoretical framework used is integrative-ecological, combining teacher knowledge theories such as *Pedagogical Content Knowledge* (PCK) (Shulman, 2020), motivational theories such as *self-efficacy* (Bandura, 2020), and context theories such as *ecological systems theory* (Bronfenbrenner, 2021). This study was conducted on 12 PAI teachers at high schools in Tanah Datar who are running an inquiry-based "Religious

Moderation" project. The observed phenomenon suggests that although teachers have a deep understanding of religious content, they often have difficulty designing learning that demands students' critical analysis. Analysis through the lens of *Subject-Specific Teacher Readiness* (SSTR) (Grossman & McDonald, 2023) reveals that the gap between content knowledge and innovative pedagogical abilities is a major bottleneck. As a comparison, *the generic pedagogical approach* (Marzano, 2021) argues that universal teaching principles can be applied across subjects, but findings in the field emphasize the importance of disciplinary distinctiveness in PAI. Thus, this qualitative research seeks to understand the complexity of PAI teacher readiness holistically and contextually.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis of learning tools. Semi-structured interviews focused on teachers' experiences in designing and implementing deep learning-based learning, guided by the theory of *Spiritually-Engaged Pedagogical Reasoning* (SEPR) (Sahin, 2024) which emphasizes the integration of spiritual and pedagogical considerations. For example, teachers are asked to reflect on how they facilitate discussions about *ijtihad* while considering the psychological and theological safety of students. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques with the help of NVivo 12 software, following *the interactive analysis model* by (Miles et al., 2020) which included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. This analysis is strengthened by the *Integrated Readiness for Deep Learning in Islamic Education* (IRD-LIE) framework which considers aspects of competence, beliefs, identity, and ecological conditions. Comparative theories such as *evidence-based practice* (Slavin, 2022) may question the validity of subjective qualitative data, but phenomenological approaches allow researchers to capture the nuances of teachers' experiences in depth. Overall, the combination of multi-method data collection techniques and systematic thematic analysis is expected to result in a rich and authentic understanding of PAI teacher readiness.

RESULTS

The implication of these findings is the importance of developing a holistic and contextual teacher readiness framework, such as *the Integrated Readiness for Deep Learning in Islamic Education* (IRD-LIE). This framework considers aspects of competence, beliefs, identity, and ecological conditions (Biesta, 2022). Studies in Malaysia show that the integration of skills training with core value reflection is more successful (Malaysia MOE, 2023). The *evidence-based practice approach* may question the validity of the spiritual dimension (Slavin, 2022), but Islamic education demands broader considerations. So, the solution must be comprehensive and context-sensitive.

Reflections from various studies indicate that the identity of PAI teachers is dynamic and constantly negotiated between the role of guardian of tradition and agent of change (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2022). Teachers who successfully implement *project-based learning* are usually able to engage in creative negotiations between the authority of the text and the student experience. The theory of *teacher identity negotiation* reinforces this view (Day & Gu, 2021). Meanwhile, developmental psychology sees this phase as normal (Bronfenbrenner, 2021). However, successful navigation in this dialectic of identity is a determinant of readiness.

The needs analysis shows that PAI teachers need to strengthen Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) and *Spiritually-Engaged Pedagogical Reasoning* (SEPR) (Sahin, 2024). This need arises from the demands of the Independent Curriculum that integrates technology and spiritual values. Research on *contemplative pedagogy* supports the importance of deep reflection in learning (Zajonc, 2023). A *generic pedagogical approach* may consider this unnecessary (Marzano, 2021), but the peculiarities of PAI require pedagogical-spiritual reasoning skills. Thus, the training must be specially designed.

Effective completion actions include the development of lesson study-based training modules and *action research* that actively involve teachers (Jensen & Sonnemann, 2022). Implementation in several madrassas shows that this

participatory approach improves pedagogical skills and self-efficacy. The *Subject-Specific Teacher Readiness* (SSTR) framework supports the importance of a discipline-specific approach (Grossman & McDonald, 2023). In contrast, standardized training often fails because it is not contextual (Paniagua & Istance, 2021). Therefore, interventions must be based on real needs in the field.

The urgent solution that must be done is to build a tiered support system (*scaffolding*) that includes training, mentoring, learning communities, and supportive school policies (Fullan, 2021). This system should adopt a *phronesis paradigm* that emphasizes practical wisdom and ethical considerations (Biesta, 2022). Malaysia's experience in the development of Moral Education teachers can be a reference (Malaysia MOE, 2023). A purely technocratic approach is considered inadequate (Desimone, 2020). Therefore, collaboration between stakeholders is the main key.

The limitation of this study lies in its focus on the context of madrassas in East Java, so the findings may not be generalized widely. However, the novelty of this study is the support of the IRD-LIE framework that integrates spiritual, pedagogical, and ecological dimensions specifically for PAI—something that is still rare in the literature (Sahin, 2024). Previous research has mostly discussed *deep learning* in general (Hattie, 2022). Thus, this research offers specific theoretical and practical contributions to the development of Islamic education.

DISCUSSION

The readiness of PAI teachers for the *deep learning* approach is greatly influenced by the self-efficacy factor which is belief in their own abilities (Bandura, 2020). In the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, teachers are often required to design inquiry-based projects such as "Religious Moderation". The analysis shows that teachers with high self-efficacy tend to be more courageous to experiment with new methods (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2021). In comparison, traditional approaches emphasize more on content mastery without demanding much pedagogical innovation (Al-Attas, 2021). Therefore, building teacher confidence is a critical step in increasing readiness.

The main problem lies in the gap between a deep mastery of religious content and the ability to apply innovative pedagogy (Shulman, 2020). Studies in several high schools in Tanah Datar revealed that although teachers are proficient in Qur'an interpretation, they have difficulty designing role-play simulations to teach the concept of social justice. This gap shows the weakness of *PAI-specific Pedagogical Content Knowledge* (PCK) (Grossman & McDonald, 2023). On the other hand, cross-subject research argues that generic pedagogical competencies can be transferred (Hattie, 2022). However, the peculiarities of spiritual values in PAI require a more specific approach, thus demanding further exploration.

The impact of this unpreparedness is the inhibition of achieving *the goal of deep learning* that emphasizes critical and reflective analysis in PAI learning (Hashim & Rahman, 2023). Observations show that students in classes with traditional methods tend to be passive and less involved in higher-level thinking processes. This corroborates the finding that the integration of content, pedagogy, and technology knowledge (TPACK) is essential (Mishra & Koehler, 2023). Competency-based approaches often ignore this affective dimension (Paniagua & Istance, 2021). Thus, PAI learning risks not touching the spiritual realm and character if the teacher is not prepared.

Previous research offers solutions through mentoring programs and communities of practice to enhance teachers' pedagogical capacity (Desimone, 2020). For example, a study in Singapore showed that intensive mentoring can increase teachers' confidence in applying complex pedagogy. These findings are supported by a theory of educational change that emphasizes ongoing support (Fullan, 2021). On the other hand, the *one-shot training approach* is considered less effective because it does not touch on motivation and context aspects (Gess-Newsome, 2023). Therefore, collaborative mentoring is the key to success.

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competence, beliefs, identity, and ecological conditions (Biesta, 2022). Studies in Malaysia show that the integration of skills training with core value reflection is more successful (Malaysia MOE, 2023). The *evidence-based practice approach* may question the validity of the spiritual dimension (Slavin, 2022), but Islamic education demands broader considerations. So, the solution must be comprehensive and context-sensitive.

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This study's limitation lies in its focus on the context of madrasas in East Java, so the findings may not be widely generalizable. However, the novelty of this study is the use of the IRD-LIE framework, which integrates spiritual, pedagogical, and ecological dimensions specifically for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) – something that is still rare in the literature (Sahin, 2024). Previous research has focused more on deep learning in general (Hattie, 2022). Therefore, this study offers specific theoretical and practical contributions to the development of Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

The readiness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to implement the deep learning approach is a complex construct influenced by the negotiation between maintaining religious traditions and adopting innovative pedagogical practices. This finding is consistent with the theory of teacher identity negotiation which explains that professional identity is continuously shaped through social interaction and professional experience (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2022). In the context of Islamic education, teachers who successfully apply deep learning strategies are those who are able to integrate religious knowledge with critical and reflective learning experiences for students. This ability reflects the importance of Subject-Specific Teacher Readiness which emphasizes that effective teaching requires a deep understanding of both disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical strategies (Grossman & McDonald, 2023). Furthermore, the findings highlight that teacher readiness is not only determined by mastery of religious content but also by pedagogical competence, technological integration, and teacher self-efficacy. This

perspective is in line with the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework which emphasizes the integration of content knowledge, pedagogy, and technology in effective learning (Marzano, 2021).

In addition, teachers' confidence in implementing innovative learning strategies plays an important role in supporting the success of deep learning implementation, as emphasized in self-efficacy theory (Biesta, 2022). Therefore, improving the quality of PAI learning in the era of the Independent Curriculum requires systematic efforts to strengthen teachers' pedagogical competence, self-efficacy, and contextual support systems. Teacher professional development programs should focus not only on content mastery but also on pedagogical innovation, reflective practice, and collaborative professional learning. Sustainable mentoring and professional learning communities are also essential to support teachers in adapting to curriculum changes and implementing deep learning effectively (Slavin, 2022). Nevertheless, considering the complexity and distinctive characteristics of the religious education context, the recommendation to combine in-depth qualitative research with participatory approaches is considered more appropriate for generating authentic understanding and sustainable solutions. Therefore, future research agendas need to integrate theoretical exploration with deeper practical engagement in the field.

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