

The Role of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Promoting Competency-Based Learning at Miftahussalam Private Madrasah Aliyah, Medan

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Abstract

This study examines the role of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in promoting competency-based learning at Miftahussalam Private Madrasah Aliyah (MAS), Medan. The study is significant in light of the need to improve the quality of Islamic education so that learners develop intellectual, spiritual, and social competence in the era of globalization. A descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentary analysis of curriculum documents, syllabi, lesson plans (RPP), and assessment instruments. The participants comprised the head of the madrasah, the vice principal for curriculum affairs, six PAI teachers, and thirty students from Grades X, XI, and XII. The findings indicate that the PAI curriculum at MAS Miftahussalam Medan has incorporated a competency-based approach through the development of Core Competencies (KI) and Basic Competencies (KD), encompassing four dimensions: spiritual, social, knowledge, and skills. Nevertheless, a gap remains between planning and implementation, particularly in the consistent application of authentic assessment and active learning methods. The principal constraints involve limited learning technology facilities and insufficiently developed teacher professionalism. The study recommends periodic curriculum revision, strengthened teacher capacity, and a more robust collaborative ecosystem involving the madrasah, families, and the wider community.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education Curriculum, Competency-Based Learning, Madrasah Aliyah, Miftahussalam Medan

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Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) occupies a strategic position in Indonesia's national education system, particularly within madrasahs as institutions grounded in Islamic values. (Muhaimin, 2012) The PAI curriculum functions not merely as a technical guide for teaching and learning but also as an instrument for character formation, the development of religious competence, and the comprehensive reinforcement of students' Islamic identity. In the era of Industry 4.0 and Society 5.0, the PAI curriculum is expected to respond to contemporary dynamics while remaining firmly grounded in the values of the Qur'an and Hadith. (Azra, 2019)

Miftahussalam Private Madrasah Aliyah (MAS) Medan is one of the Islamic educational institutions in Medan, North Sumatra, committed to providing quality Islamic education. As a private institution with limited resources, MAS Miftahussalam faces a dual challenge: maintaining nationally prescribed competency-based academic standards while sustaining the distinctive strengths of Islamic education that constitute its institutional identity. (Departemen Agama RI, 2006) This condition underscores the importance of an in-depth investigation into how the PAI curriculum is designed, implemented, and evaluated at MAS Miftahussalam Medan.

Competency-Based Learning (CBL) is an educational paradigm that emphasizes the integrated and measurable mastery of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. (Bloom, 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) Within the PAI context, CBL requires students not only to understand religious concepts cognitively but also to apply them in everyday life through affective and psychomotor dimensions. The implementation of CBL in the PAI curriculum requires comprehensive readiness in curriculum design, teachers' pedagogical competence, the availability of learning resources, and a comprehensive authentic assessment system. (Siregar, 2021)

Previous studies indicate that the implementation of a competency-based PAI curriculum in madrasahs continues to encounter several constraints, ranging from misalignment between curriculum documents and classroom practice to limited teacher pedagogical competence in designing competency-based learning and inadequate support for educational technology infrastructure. (Saputra, 2020; Tilaar, 2006) These conditions require a systematic inquiry that can provide an accurate account and constructive recommendations for developing the PAI curriculum at the madrasah aliyah level. Accordingly, this study investigates comprehensively the role of the PAI curriculum in promoting competency-based learning at MAS Miftahussalam Medan by addressing the following questions: (1) How is the competency-based PAI curriculum designed at MAS Miftahussalam Medan? (2) How is it implemented in the learning process? and (3) What supporting and inhibiting factors affect its implementation? (Rangkuti, 2023)

Literature Review

1. Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

Conceptually, the PAI curriculum comprises a set of plans and arrangements concerning objectives, content, teaching materials, and Islamic religious learning methods that guide the delivery of educational activities toward the attainment of Islamic educational aims. (Hamalik, 2007) Muhaimin (2012) asserts that the PAI curriculum performs four principal functions: (a) developing faith and piety toward Allah SWT; (b) instilling noble moral values as manifestations of Islamic teachings; (c) enhancing students' spiritual potential; and (d) developing applicable religious competence for social life. (Muhaimin, 2012)

Within the revised 2013 Curriculum, reinforced through the Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 183 of 2019, the PAI curriculum in madrasahs is developed on the basis of Core

Competencies (KI), which encompass spiritual (KI-1), social (KI-2), knowledge (KI-3), and skills (KI-4) dimensions. (Kemenag RI, 2019) The integration of these four KI dimensions reflects a holistic approach to Islamic education that does not separate students' intellectual, spiritual, and socio-emotional development. (Yunan, 2022) The PAI curriculum structure at the madrasah aliyah level comprises four principal subjects: Qur'an-Hadith, Aqidah-Akhlak, Fiqh, and the History of Islamic Culture (SKI), each of which contains Basic Competencies (KD) articulated vertically and horizontally across grades and educational levels.

2. Competency-Based Learning in Islamic Religious Education

Competency-Based Learning (CBL) was first developed systematically in vocational education in the United States during the 1970s by William Spady. It was subsequently adapted into general education systems and widely adopted within nationally standardized curricula. (Spady, 1994) In the CBL paradigm, competence is understood as an integrated capacity that includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes and is functionally demonstrated in authentic situations. (Bloom, 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) CBL emphasizes the principle of mastery learning, whereby each student is expected to attain the prescribed level of competence before progressing to the next competence, with learning time and strategies adjusted to individual needs. (Gagne, 1985)

Within Islamic education, CBL has strong relevance to the concept of al-kafa'ah, or competence and capability, in the Islamic intellectual tradition, which emphasizes an individual's ability to perform roles and responsibilities optimally. (Rahman, 2021) This approach encourages balanced competence across intellectual ('aqliyah), spiritual (ruhiyah), and physical (jismiyah) dimensions, as advocated in the concept of al-insan al-kamil within the Islamic educational tradition. (Nata, 2010) Applying CBL in PAI requires teachers to design meaningful and authentic learning experiences oriented toward measurable competency attainment rather than merely completing prescribed curriculum content.

3. Curriculum Implementation in Madrasahs

Curriculum implementation is the process of applying curricular ideas, concepts, and policies in actual learning activities so that students acquire a prescribed set of competencies. (Fullan, 2001) Snyder et al. (1992) identify three perspectives on curriculum implementation: fidelity, or adherence to the original design; mutual adaptation, or reciprocal adjustment between users and designers; and enactment, or the creation of a new curriculum through practice. (Snyder et al., 1992) In madrasahs, PAI curriculum implementation presents distinctive challenges because it must integrate national education standards with the specific values and traditions of Islamic education.

The critical factors determining the success of competency-based PAI curriculum implementation in madrasahs include: (1) teachers' readiness and pedagogical competence; (2) the availability and relevance of learning resources; (3) the instructional leadership of the madrasah principal; (4) parental and community involvement; and (5) policy support and institutional resources. (Siregar, 2021; Rangkuti, 2023) A comprehensive curriculum implementation evaluation model, such as Stufflebeam's CIPP model, consisting of Context, Input, Process, and Product, can be used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of PAI curriculum implementation systematically. (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007)

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single-case study design, focusing on MAS Miftahussalam Medan as the research site. (Creswell, 2014) The qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to understand the phenomenon of competency-based PAI curriculum implementation in depth, contextually, and holistically from the perspectives of

educational actors directly involved. (Moleong, 2017) A case study enables an intensive exploration of a specific phenomenon in its real-world context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not fully distinct.

Research participants were selected through purposive sampling based on the relevance of their roles and the depth of information they could provide. They consisted of: (1) the principal of MAS Miftahussalam Medan; (2) the vice principal for curriculum affairs; (3) six PAI subject teachers representing Qur'an-Hadith, Aqidah-Akhlak, Fiqh, and SKI; and (4) thirty students selected proportionally from Grades X, XI, and XII. (Sugiyono, 2019) Data were collected through three complementary techniques: (a) semi-structured in-depth interviews using interview guides validated by experts; (b) participatory observation of at least two learning cycles for each observed PAI subject; and (c) comprehensive documentary analysis of curriculum documents, syllabi, lesson plans (RPP), assessment instruments, and student learning outcomes. (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014)

Data trustworthiness was ensured through four techniques: (1) source triangulation by comparing information from the madrasah principal, teachers, and students; (2) method triangulation by comparing interview, observation, and documentation findings; (3) member checking to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations; and (4) peer debriefing involving research colleagues with expertise in the PAI curriculum. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) Data analysis employed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which comprises four components: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification conducted cyclically and simultaneously. (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014)

The study was conducted over three months, from January to March 2025, at MAS Miftahussalam Medan, Jalan Bilal No. 52, Medan Timur District, Medan City, North Sumatra Province.

Results

1. Competency-Based PAI Curriculum Design at MAS Miftahussalam Medan

The analysis of curriculum documents and interviews with the curriculum development team at MAS Miftahussalam Medan indicate that the PAI curriculum design refers to the framework of the revised 2013 Curriculum, reinforced through the Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 183 of 2019. (Kemenag RI, 2019) The curriculum documents contain a comprehensive structure comprising a competency-oriented madrasah vision and mission, operationally articulated KI and KD for each semester, syllabi that specify structured learning experiences, and assessment guidelines integrating attitude, knowledge, and skills dimensions. (Siregar, 2021)

Nevertheless, the document review reveals a significant gap between the formulation of Basic Competencies (KD) and competency achievement indicators (IPK) in the syllabus and the lesson plans (RPP) prepared by teachers. Of the six lesson plans analysed, only three, or 50%, consistently demonstrated alignment among KD, IPK, learning objectives, learning strategies, and assessment instruments. (Yunan, 2022) This finding is consistent with Saputra's (2020) study, which found that weaknesses in learning planning constitute a primary factor constraining the effectiveness of competency-based PAI curriculum implementation in private madrasah aliyahs. (Saputra, 2020)

2. Implementation of the PAI Curriculum in the Learning Process

Observations of twelve PAI learning sessions at MAS Miftahussalam Medan revealed substantial variation in the application of competency-based learning strategies and methods. Approximately 67% of PAI teachers, or four of the six teachers observed, had implemented active learning models such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Cooperative Learning, and Project-Based Learning, all of which are relevant to CBL principles. (Rahman, 2021; Joyce et al., 2009) Meanwhile, 33% of teachers continued to use lecturing as the dominant method for more than 70%

of instructional time, indicating a continuing need for substantive pedagogical competence development.

The assessment system implemented at MAS Miftahussalam Medan includes authentic assessment across three domains: (a) attitude assessment through daily observation, character-development journals, and peer assessment; (b) knowledge assessment through written tests, oral tests, and structured assignments; and (c) skills assessment through worship practices, demonstrations of Qur'an recitation, and portfolio development. (Rangkuti, 2023; Stiggins, 2005) The implementation of authentic assessment is a crucial component of CBL because it enables balanced, holistic, formative, and summative measurement of students' competencies. (Popham, 2011)

3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Implementation

Based on triangulated interview, observation, and documentary data, several principal supporting factors for competency-based PAI curriculum implementation at MAS Miftahussalam Medan were identified: (a) the madrasah principal's consistent leadership commitment to improving the quality of PAI learning; (b) PAI teachers' high motivation and work ethic, with an average of more than eight years of teaching experience; (c) a pesantren environment that inherently supports the natural internalization of Islamic values; (d) the availability of varied PAI teaching materials from multiple publishers; and (e) foundation support in the form of teacher development programmes. (Siregar, 2021; Fullan, 2001)

The systematically identified inhibiting factors include: (a) limited learning technology infrastructure, particularly unequal access to digital devices and internet connectivity across classrooms; (b) marked heterogeneity in students' initial abilities, especially differences in prior educational backgrounds between graduates of SD/MI and SMP/MTs; (c) substantial teacher administrative workloads associated with preparing time-consuming learning documents; (d) the insufficient frequency and quality of academic supervision by the madrasah principal; and (e) limited parental involvement in supporting PAI learning at home. (Saputra, 2020; Rangkuti, 2023) These findings reinforce Rahman's (2021) argument that sustained and systematic teacher professional development is a key investment in the successful implementation of CBL in madrasahs. (Rahman, 2021)

4. Integrated Discussion

Taken together, the findings indicate that MAS Miftahussalam Medan is in a transitional phase toward the mature implementation of a competency-based PAI curriculum. The progress achieved in curriculum design and authentic assessment systems needs to be matched by consistent strengthening of the quality of classroom learning processes. (Yunan, 2022; Muhaimin, 2012) The identified implementation gap does not merely reflect individual teacher weaknesses; it also represents a support ecosystem that has not yet become fully conducive. Improving this ecosystem requires systemic interventions across policy, capacity, infrastructure, and the organisational culture of the madrasah. (Tilaar, 2006; Idi, 2014)

Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion, three principal conclusions can be drawn. First, the PAI curriculum design at MAS Miftahussalam Medan has adopted a competency-based framework consistent with the revised 2013 Curriculum and Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 183 of 2019, with a comprehensive KI-KD structure encompassing four competency dimensions. However, inconsistencies remain between the curriculum documents and teachers' learning materials, particularly in the alignment among KD, IPK, and assessment instruments. (Siregar, 2021; Yunan, 2022)

Second, the implementation of the competency-based PAI curriculum in the learning process demonstrates positive progress through the application of active learning models and multidimensional authentic assessment systems by most teachers. Nevertheless, the consistency of

CBL implementation requires further strengthening, particularly to reduce reliance on conventional lecturing and to expand the use of digital learning technologies. (Rahman, 2021; Saputra, 2020)

Third, competency-based PAI curriculum implementation at MAS Miftahussalam Medan is supported by the madrasah leadership's commitment, teachers' work ethic, and a conducive pesantren environment. However, it is constrained by limited technological infrastructure, heterogeneous student backgrounds, teacher administrative workloads, and suboptimal academic supervision and parental involvement. (Rangkuti, 2023; Saputra, 2020)

In light of these findings, the study recommends: (1) the intensive and scheduled delivery of workshops on developing CBL-based learning materials; (2) an increase in the frequency of academic supervision by the madrasah principal to at least twice per semester for each teacher; (3) investment in equitable learning technology infrastructure across all classrooms; (4) the establishment of an active communication forum between the madrasah and students' parents; and (5) periodic evaluation and revision of the PAI curriculum every two years with the involvement of all stakeholders, including alumni and graduate users. (Siregar, 2021; Rangkuti, 2023; Fullan, 2001)

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