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Lesson Planning in Islamic Religious Education: A Case Study of Pedagogical Competence, Challenges, and Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

Effective lesson planning is essential for translating the Merdeka Curriculum into meaningful, contextual, and student-centered Islamic Religious Education (PAI), particularly because PAI learning involves not only the development of knowledge but also students' attitudes, religious values, and practices. Although previous studies have widely discussed the pedagogical competence of PAI teachers and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, limited attention has been given to lesson planning as a specific domain that connects pedagogical competence, planning challenges, and professional development within a particular school context. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the pedagogical competence of a PAI teacher in lesson planning, identify the challenges encountered, and explore the efforts made to develop such competence. This study employed a qualitative single-school case study at SMAN 5 Karawang, West Java, Indonesia. The informants consisted of one PAI teacher as the key informant and two tenth-grade students as supporting informants who were selected purposively. Data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings showed that the teacher demonstrated pedagogical competence by designing lesson plans based on students' characteristics, curriculum requirements, contextual learning materials, student-centered instructional strategies, appropriate learning resources, and comprehensive assessment. The main challenges were related to curriculum adaptation, the preparation of teaching and assessment documents, limited time and workload, learning facilities, and student diversity. The teacher developed pedagogical competence through continuous professional learning, collaboration with colleagues, school-based supervision, and reflective practice based on classroom experiences and students' feedback. These findings indicate that PAI lesson planning should be understood not merely as an administrative requirement but as a reflective, contextual, and adaptive pedagogical process that responds to students' learning needs. This study contributes to a better understanding of pedagogical competence in PAI lesson planning and highlights the importance of continuous professional development, teacher collaboration, and institutional support. However, as this study was conducted in a single school with a limited number of informants, the findings should be interpreted within the specific context of the case.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Twenty-first-century education requires schools to provide learning processes that are adaptive, meaningful, and oriented toward the holistic development of students' competencies. Learning can no longer be understood merely as the transmission of subject matter; rather, it must be designed as a process that develops knowledge, critical thinking skills, character, and students' ability to respond to social change and contemporary challenges. In this context, the quality of learning is strongly influenced by teachers' ability to design structured, contextual, and student-centered learning experiences. Lesson planning, therefore, becomes a crucial initial stage because it determines learning objectives, materials, methods, media, learning resources, and assessment strategies used in classroom practice [1]–[5].

Normatively, the importance of teacher competence is emphasized in Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, which states that teachers are required to possess pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies. Pedagogical competence is one of the core competencies because it is directly related to teachers' ability to understand students, design learning, implement instruction, evaluate learning outcomes, and develop students' potential. Regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 16 of 2007 also affirms that teacher competence includes the ability to understand students' characteristics, master learning theories, develop curriculum, organize educative learning, and conduct learning evaluation. Thus, lesson planning is not merely an administrative requirement, but part of teachers' professional responsibility to ensure the quality of the learning process [6]–[8]

In Islamic Religious Education, pedagogical competence has an increasingly important position because PAI is not only oriented toward students' mastery of religious knowledge, but also toward the formation of morality, spirituality, and character. PAI teachers are required to translate Islamic values into learning experiences that are closely connected to students' lives, so that religious materials do not remain as normative memorization, but become practical guidance for thinking, behaving, and acting. Therefore, PAI lesson planning needs to consider students' characteristics, stages of adolescent development, social contexts, and the challenges faced by students in contemporary life. The role of PAI teachers as learning designers is essential because the quality of lesson planning will influence the quality of learning implementation in the classroom [9]–[11].

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum further emphasizes the importance of teachers' ability to design flexible, student-centered, and needs-based learning plans. Within the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are not only required to prepare teaching documents formally, but also to understand Learning Outcomes, formulate Learning Objectives, organize the Flow of Learning Objectives, select essential materials, determine appropriate teaching methods, and design meaningful assessments. Previous studies have shown that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education requires teachers to develop adaptive planning, contextual Islamic learning, project-based activities, authentic assessment, and character strengthening. However, several studies also indicate that teachers still face challenges in terms of readiness, curriculum understanding,

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media utilization, preparation of teaching documents, and development of assessments that are aligned with students' needs [12]–[14].

In this study, pedagogical competence is operationally understood as the teacher's ability to understand students' characteristics and translate curriculum requirements into appropriate decisions concerning learning objectives, materials, instructional methods, media and learning resources, and assessment. Lesson planning refers to the process of translating the Merdeka Curriculum into an organized learning design through the analysis of Learning Outcomes, formulation of Learning Objectives and the Flow of Learning Objectives, selection of contextual materials and instructional strategies, planning of learning resources, and development of assessments that respond to students' needs.

Previous studies have widely examined PAI teachers' pedagogical competence in relation to learning implementation, the Merdeka Curriculum, character strengthening, and teacher professional development. Collectively, these studies indicate that pedagogical competence involves understanding students, developing adaptive and student-centered learning, selecting appropriate materials and media, and designing assessment and reflection. However, previous research has more often addressed pedagogical competence in general or focused on classroom implementation, while the specific role of pedagogical competence in lesson planning, including its challenges and development efforts, remains less explored in a single-school case context [1], [3], [10].

A preliminary study at SMAN 5 Karawang indicated that the PAI teacher had begun to use diagnostic assessment and curriculum-based lesson planning, while still encountering challenges related to curriculum adaptation, teaching documents, time constraints, learning facilities, and student diversity. These initial observations provided the contextual basis for examining the teacher's lesson-planning practices more systematically.

Based on the above explanation, the research gap lies in the limited number of studies that specifically connect PAI teachers' pedagogical competence with lesson planning, the problems encountered, and the efforts made to develop such competence in the context of a case study at the senior high school level. Therefore, this study is necessary to fill the gap in understanding how pedagogical competence is reflected in PAI lesson planning, what challenges arise in the planning process, and how competence development efforts are carried out to improve the quality of PAI learning.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus, which does not merely describe the pedagogical competence of PAI teachers in general, but specifically situates it within the context of lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang. This study integrates three main aspects: the teacher's pedagogical competence in designing learning, the problems faced in the planning process, and efforts to develop pedagogical competence through reflection, training, collaboration, and adjustment of learning to students' needs. By incorporating both teacher and student perspectives, this single-school case study is expected to provide a contextual understanding of PAI lesson planning at the senior high school level.

Based on this background, this study aims to describe the pedagogical competence of the PAI teacher in lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang, identify the problems encountered in lesson planning, and analyze efforts to develop pedagogical competence in

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improving the quality of lesson planning. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich the literature on PAI teachers' pedagogical competence, particularly in the aspect of lesson planning within the Merdeka Curriculum context. Practically, this study may serve as a reflection for PAI teachers, schools, and educational policymakers in designing teacher competence development programs that are more relevant to the real needs of classroom learning.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How is the PAI teacher's pedagogical competence reflected in lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang? (2) What challenges does the PAI teacher encounter in lesson planning? (3) What efforts are undertaken to develop the PAI teacher's pedagogical competence in lesson planning?

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in lesson planning, including the problems encountered and the efforts made to develop such competence within a real school context. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring meanings, experiences, practices, and social processes that occur naturally in educational settings [15]–[17]. The case study design was used because this research focused on a specific case, namely the pedagogical competence of a PAI teacher in lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang. A case study enables researchers to examine a phenomenon comprehensively when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its real-life context are not clearly separated [18]–[20].

The research was conducted at SMAN 5 Karawang, West Java, Indonesia. This school was selected purposively because it has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and provides a relevant context for examining how a PAI teacher designs lesson plans, adapts learning to students' needs, and responds to challenges in the planning process. Within this context, PAI lesson planning follows the Merdeka Curriculum framework, which requires the teacher to interpret Learning Outcomes, formulate Learning Objectives, organize learning sequences, select appropriate learning materials and strategies, and design assessments that respond to students' learning needs.

The research participants consisted of one PAI teacher as the key informant and two tenth-grade students as supporting informants. The PAI teacher was selected because of his direct role in preparing lesson plans, teaching modules, learning objectives, learning materials, instructional methods, media, and assessment strategies. The teacher held a Master's degree in Education and had five years of teaching experience. The two students were selected purposively because they were directly involved in PAI learning taught by the teacher and were considered able to provide relevant information about the learning process. One student was the class leader, while the other was a high-achieving student. Informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance, involvement, and ability to provide information related to the focus of the study [21].

Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted once in the classroom and lasted

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approximately 60 minutes. The interviews explored the teacher's pedagogical competence in lesson planning, the challenges encountered in preparing learning plans, and the efforts made to improve planning quality. The teacher interview focused on students' characteristics, curriculum understanding, formulation of learning objectives, selection of materials, instructional methods, media and learning resources, assessment planning, and professional development. The student interviews focused on their experiences of PAI learning, including teaching methods, clarity of learning objectives, relevance of materials, use of media, assessment practices, and learning constraints.

Classroom observation was conducted once during the PAI learning process. The observation focused on the classroom situation, implementation of the planned learning activities, use of instructional methods and media, student participation, classroom interaction, and the relationship between lesson planning and its implementation in the classroom [21], [22], [23], [24].

The trustworthiness of the data was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from the PAI teacher and students, while technique triangulation was conducted by comparing interview data with observation and document analysis. Member checking was also used to ensure that the researcher's interpretation was consistent with the information provided by informants. Transferability was supported by providing a clear description of the research context, informants, and field findings. Dependability was maintained through a systematic research procedure, while confirmability was strengthened by keeping field notes, interview records, and documentation as an audit trail throughout the research process [25].

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation was carried out by selecting, simplifying, and focusing data relevant to the pedagogical competence of PAI teachers in lesson planning. Data display was conducted by organizing the findings into thematic narratives based on the research focus, including teacher competence in lesson planning, problems encountered in the planning process, and efforts to develop pedagogical competence. Conclusion drawing and verification were conducted continuously during the research process by identifying patterns, relationships, similarities, and differences among the data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents [21].

The research was conducted in June 2026 at SMAN 5 Karawang. The initial stage involved preparing research instruments, determining informants, and arranging field access. The data collection stage was conducted through interviews with the PAI teacher and students, classroom observation, and examination of relevant learning documents. The final stage involved organizing, reducing, interpreting, and verifying the data in accordance with the research focus. Through this methodological process, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of PAI teachers' pedagogical competence in lesson planning, the problems encountered in the planning process, and the efforts made to develop such competence in the context of senior high school Islamic Religious Education.

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3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. PAI Teachers' Pedagogical Competence in Lesson Planning

The first finding of this study shows that the pedagogical competence of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher in lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang was reflected in several key abilities, namely understanding students' characteristics, understanding the curriculum, formulating learning objectives, selecting learning materials, determining instructional methods, planning media and learning resources, and designing learning assessments. Lesson planning was not merely carried out as an administrative requirement, but was developed by considering students' needs, the characteristics of PAI materials, the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum, and the objectives of developing students' religious understanding and moral character.

Based on the interview data, the PAI teacher explained that before preparing the teaching module, he first conducted diagnostic assessments, both cognitive and non-cognitive. The cognitive assessment was used to identify students' prior knowledge of PAI materials, while the non-cognitive assessment was used to understand students' learning styles, interests, needs, and social backgrounds. The PAI teacher stated:

> *"Before preparing the Teaching Module, I first conduct diagnostic assessments, both cognitive and non-cognitive. For the non-cognitive assessment, I examine students' learning profiles, their learning styles, and their environmental background in Karawang. Meanwhile, for the cognitive assessment, I assess the extent of their prior understanding of the PAI material to be discussed."*

In terms of curriculum understanding, the PAI teacher demonstrated the ability to translate the Merdeka Curriculum into lesson planning. The teacher understood that the Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility for teachers to select essential materials and design deeper learning experiences. In practice, the teacher analyzed the Learning Outcomes for Phase E for Grade X and Phase F for Grades XI and XII, then derived them into Learning Objectives and organized them into a Flow of Learning Objectives. The PAI teacher explained:

> *"I first analyze the Learning Outcomes for Phase E for Grade X and Phase F for Grades XI and XII. From these Learning Outcomes, I derive Learning Objectives, which are then logically grouped into a Flow of Learning Objectives."*

This finding indicates that the teacher understood the relationship between the curriculum and teaching documents. The teacher did not treat the curriculum merely as a formal document, but translated it into a more operational learning sequence. This was also experienced by students. Students stated that the PAI teacher usually explained the learning objectives at the beginning of the lesson, enabling them to understand the direction of learning. The PAI materials were also perceived as being delivered systematically, starting from reading religious texts, understanding their meanings, explaining their significance, and connecting them with examples from everyday life.

Students also stated that PAI assessment was carried out through classroom participation, daily assignments, tests, presentations, Qur'an reading practice, and worship

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practices such as prayer. Students perceived that the assessments given by the teacher were aligned with the materials that had been taught. This indicates that the assessment planning carried out by the teacher attempted to measure students' abilities more comprehensively, including knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

Based on these findings, it can be interpreted that the pedagogical competence of the PAI teacher in lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang was relatively strong. The teacher did not merely prepare teaching documents as administrative requirements, but connected lesson planning with students' characteristics, the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum, learning objectives, contextual materials, active learning methods, instructional media, and varied assessments. This finding indicates that effective PAI lesson planning requires pedagogical competence that is not only technical, but also reflective, contextual, and responsive to students' needs.

Table 1. Summary of PAI Teachers' Pedagogical Competence in Lesson Planning

No.	Aspect of Pedagogical Competence	Main Findings	Interpretation
1	Understanding students' characteristics	The teacher conducted cognitive and non-cognitive diagnostic assessments to identify students' prior knowledge, learning styles, interests, needs, and backgrounds. Students also stated that the teacher checked their prior understanding before explaining new materials.	Lesson planning was based on students' actual conditions, indicating that the teacher understood the importance of student-centered planning.
2	Understanding the curriculum	The teacher analyzed Learning Outcomes, formulated Learning Objectives, and organized the Flow of Learning Objectives in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum.	The teacher was able to translate curriculum documents into operational and systematic lesson planning.
3	Formulating learning objectives	Learning objectives were formulated by considering competencies, material scope, SMART principles, and measurable operational verbs.	PAI learning objectives were designed to integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.
4	Selecting learning materials	The teacher selected essential materials and connected them with adolescent issues, such as social media ethics, online gambling, cyberbullying, and moral challenges.	PAI materials were planned contextually so that they were relevant to students' daily lives and moral development.
5	Selecting instructional methods	The teacher used student-centered methods, including Problem-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning, Discovery Learning, discussion, question-and-answer activities, and case-based learning.	Instructional methods were planned to encourage student participation, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving.
6	Planning media and learning resources	The teacher used textbooks, the Qur'an, learning videos, infographics, Canva, and interactive applications, although digital facilities were still limited.	The teacher demonstrated the ability to plan varied learning media, but implementation depended on the availability of school facilities.
7	Designing learning assessment	The teacher designed formative and summative assessments, reflection, practice, projects, assessment grids, and rubrics.	Assessment planning was comprehensive because it measured knowledge, attitudes, and religious skills.

These findings strengthen several previous studies. First, the finding on diagnostic assessment and the understanding of students' characteristics is consistent with Abrianto

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who emphasized that PAI teachers' pedagogical competence is reflected in their ability to understand students' conditions, select learning materials, and manage learning according to students' needs. Second, the finding on the teacher's ability to derive Learning Outcomes into Learning Objectives and a Flow of Learning Objectives is in line with Watoni who explained that PAI teachers in the Merdeka Curriculum are required to design adaptive, contextual, and student-centered lesson plans. Third, the finding on the use of active learning methods, instructional media, and authentic assessment supports Sumarniningsih who argued that a good lesson plan should include clear objectives, learning activities, instructional strategies, and well-directed evaluation. Thus, the pedagogical competence of the PAI teacher in lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang can be understood as an integrative ability that connects understanding of students, curriculum, materials, strategies, media, and assessment into a meaningful learning design.

3.2. Problems Encountered by PAI Teachers in Lesson Planning

The second finding of this study shows that PAI lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang was not free from various problems. The challenges identified in this study included adaptation to the Merdeka Curriculum, technical difficulties in preparing teaching documents, limited time and teacher workload, limited facilities and learning resources, and the diversity of students' characteristics. These problems indicate that lesson planning is not merely related to the teacher's individual competence, but is also connected to curriculum policy changes, administrative demands, school facility readiness, and the diverse conditions of students.

From the students' perspective, the problems were also seen in the limited availability of facilities and learning resources. Students stated that learning facilities were generally adequate, but digital facilities such as projectors were still limited. As a result, teachers could not always use audiovisual media or learning videos optimally. One student stated:

> *"Actually, textbooks are available, but digital facilities such as projectors are limited at school, so teachers have to take turns with other classes, and this slightly hinders teaching variation."*

This data indicates that the teacher's ability to design media-based learning cannot always be implemented optimally if it is not supported by adequate facilities. Teachers may plan to use videos, images, or interactive media, but the implementation still depends on the availability of school equipment. In addition, students also suggested that religious reading references and interactive digital learning media should be increased so that PAI learning becomes richer and more engaging.

Another prominent problem was the diversity of students' characteristics. Students have different abilities, interests, levels of discipline, and levels of religious understanding. In PAI learning, differences in Qur'an reading ability, basic religious knowledge, interest in learning materials, and classroom discipline become particular challenges for teachers in designing lesson plans. One student explained:

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"Students' Qur'an reading ability and religious understanding are different. The teacher usually gives more attention or special guidance to students who are not yet fluent in reading the Qur'an."

In addition to diverse abilities, students' interest in PAI learning also varied. Some students were enthusiastic about stories, worship practices, or discussions, while others were less focused and considered PAI to be a subject with too much memorization. Student discipline also affected the smoothness of learning. Students stated that when some classmates were noisy, talked to each other, or did not pay attention, the teacher had to stop explaining in order to restore classroom order. This condition shows that teachers need to design lesson plans that consider not only learning materials, but also classroom management strategies.

Problems in learning implementation also became important input for subsequent lesson planning. Students stated that PAI materials sometimes felt dense, especially in topics related to Islamic history or long memorization of religious texts. Learning also became more difficult when PAI was scheduled in the afternoon because students tended to become sleepy and less focused. In addition, learning became less engaging when the teacher relied too much on lecturing without incorporating discussions, quizzes, practice, or visual media. These findings indicate that lesson planning needs to consider material density, learning time, teaching method variation, and students' psychological conditions.

Based on these findings, it can be interpreted that the problems encountered by the PAI teacher in lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang were multidimensional. The challenges did not only arise from the teacher's ability to understand the curriculum and prepare teaching documents, but also from limited time, workload, facility availability, and diverse student characteristics. Although the teacher demonstrated serious efforts in preparing lesson plans, the quality of planning still requires institutional support, learning facilities, continuous competence development, and adaptive strategies in responding to students' diversity.

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Table 2. Summary of Problems Encountered by PAI Teachers in Lesson Planning

No.	Problem Aspect	Main Finding	Interpretation
1	Adaptation to the Merdeka Curriculum	The teacher experienced an adaptation period in understanding the shift from material targets to phase-based Learning Outcomes. Initial difficulties appeared in deriving Learning Outcomes into Learning Objectives and organizing the Flow of Learning Objectives.	Curriculum change requires a paradigm shift from being a material transmitter to becoming an adaptive and reflective learning designer.
2	Preparation of teaching documents	The teacher faced technical challenges in preparing differentiated teaching modules, student worksheets, diagnostic assessments, and authentic assessment rubrics.	Teaching documents in the Merdeka Curriculum require more complex pedagogical competence, not merely administrative completion.
3	Time and workload	The teacher had limited time due to teaching duties, administration, school committee tasks, and religious mentoring activities.	Teacher workload may reduce the space for reflection and preparation in developing lesson plans in depth.
4	Facilities and learning resources	Digital facilities such as projectors were limited, while religious reading materials and interactive learning media still needed improvement.	The implementation of media-based lesson planning depends on the readiness of school facilities and learning resources.
5	Students' characteristics	Students had different levels of Qur'an reading ability, learning interest, discipline, and religious understanding.	Student diversity requires teachers to design flexible, differentiated, and needs-based learning plans.
6	Learning implementation conditions	Dense materials, afternoon schedules, and dominant lecturing made some students less focused and less engaged.	Lesson planning needs to consider material density, learning time, method variation, and students' psychological readiness.

These findings are in line with several previous studies. First, Simbolon showed that teachers face difficulties in adapting teaching methods, developing teaching modules, and preparing assessments in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Second, Ramdhani found that Islamic Religious Education teachers encounter problems in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in relation to curriculum understanding, teaching document readiness, and the need for school support. Third, Witraguna emphasized that differentiated learning often presents challenges for teachers, especially in developing appropriate assessment criteria, organizing learning activities, and adjusting instruction to students' diversity. Fourth, Rini also explained that the challenges of differentiated learning include limited time, diverse student profiles, and difficulty in adjusting learning strategies to different learning needs. Thus, the problems found at SMAN 5 Karawang strengthen the evidence that PAI lesson planning in the Merdeka Curriculum requires pedagogical, technical, time, facility, and student-characteristic support [26].–[29]

3.3. Efforts to Develop PAI Teachers' Pedagogical Competence in Lesson Planning

The third finding of this study shows that efforts to develop the pedagogical competence of the PAI teacher in lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang were carried out through several strategies, namely independent professional development, participation in

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training and teacher professional communities, collaboration with colleagues, school-based supervision, and reflective improvement based on students' learning needs. These efforts indicate that the development of pedagogical competence was not understood as a one-time activity, but as a continuous process involving personal initiative, collegial interaction, institutional support, and classroom-based reflection.

This finding indicates that school supervision was not merely administrative control, but also functioned as pedagogical guidance. Through supervision, the teacher received feedback on the quality of teaching documents, the relevance of learning objectives, and the suitability of assessment instruments. Therefore, supervision helped ensure that lesson planning was aligned with curriculum demands and classroom needs.

The development of pedagogical competence was also carried out through reflection and improvement based on students' responses. Student interview data showed that the PAI teacher sometimes asked for students' opinions about the learning process, particularly at the end of a lesson or after an assessment. One student stated that the teacher asked whether the explanation was too fast or whether there were still materials that were confusing. Another student stated:

> *"Yes. For example, when many classmates had difficulty memorizing a surah, the teacher changed the method by asking us to read it repeatedly together in class before submitting it individually."*

This student response shows that the teacher used feedback from students as a basis for improving learning strategies. Reflection was not only conducted by the teacher individually, but was also informed by students' learning difficulties and classroom experiences. Students also suggested that PAI learning would be more understandable if the teacher used more practice, documentary films, group discussions, interactive media, and examples from real life. These student responses became important input for improving future lesson planning.

Based on these findings, it can be interpreted that efforts to develop the pedagogical competence of the PAI teacher in lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang were carried out through a combination of self-development, professional community participation, teacher collaboration, school supervision, and reflective practice. These efforts show that pedagogical competence is dynamic and continues to develop through interaction between personal learning, collegial support, institutional guidance, and students' feedback. Therefore, the development of PAI teachers' pedagogical competence requires not only individual willingness, but also a supportive school culture and sustainable professional learning opportunities.

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Table 3. Summary of Efforts to Develop PAI Teachers' Pedagogical Competence in Lesson Planning

No.	Development Effort	Main Finding	Interpretation
1	Independent professional development	The teacher improved competence by reading contemporary literature, joining webinars and online training, and studying deep learning and the Merdeka Curriculum.	Pedagogical competence developed through continuous self-learning and teacher awareness of educational changes.
2	Training and professional community participation	The teacher participated in MGMP PAI, workshops, seminars, and Merdeka Curriculum training organized by relevant institutions.	Professional communities provided spaces for knowledge upgrading, sharing good practices, and strengthening curriculum understanding.
3	Collaboration with colleagues	The teacher collaborated with fellow PAI teachers and teachers of other subjects to align learning objectives and design co-curricular projects.	Collaboration enriched lesson planning through peer review, interdisciplinary input, and shared pedagogical reflection.
4	School-based supervision	The vice principal for curriculum affairs and the principal provided guidance, review, and evaluative notes on teaching modules before classroom implementation.	Supervision functioned as pedagogical guidance to improve the quality and relevance of teaching documents.
5	Reflection based on students' feedback	The teacher asked students for input and adjusted teaching strategies when students experienced difficulties.	Student feedback became an important basis for reflective improvement and more responsive lesson planning.

These findings are supported by previous studies on teacher professional development and collaborative professional learning. First, Darling-Hammond emphasize that effective teacher professional development is sustained, content-focused, collaborative, and connected to teachers' classroom practices; this supports the finding that the PAI teacher improved his competence through training, self-learning, and practice-based reflection [30]–[33]. Second, Opfer and Pedder argue that teacher professional learning is a complex process shaped by interactions among individual teachers, professional activities, and school contexts; this is consistent with the finding that the teacher's pedagogical competence developed through the interaction of personal initiative, MGMP activities, school supervision, and classroom experience [34]. Third, Vangrieken show that teacher collaboration can support professional learning by enabling shared reflection, peer feedback, and collective problem solving; this strengthens the finding that collaboration with fellow teachers helped improve the validity and quality of lesson planning [35]. Thus, the development of PAI teachers' pedagogical competence at SMAN 5 Karawang can be understood as a continuous professional learning process supported by individual initiative, professional communities, collegial collaboration, school supervision, and student feedback.

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3.4. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the pedagogical competence of the PAI teacher in lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang is not limited to the ability to prepare teaching documents, but is reflected in the teacher's capacity to connect students' characteristics, curriculum demands, learning objectives, materials, methods, media, and assessment into a coherent instructional design. This finding is important because lesson planning in Islamic Religious Education requires more than procedural compliance; it requires pedagogical reasoning that enables teachers to transform religious knowledge into meaningful learning experiences. This is consistent with Shulman's concept of pedagogical content knowledge, which emphasizes that effective teaching depends on the teacher's ability to transform subject matter into forms that are understandable and meaningful for learners. In this study, the teacher's ability to contextualize PAI materials with students' real-life issues, such as social media ethics, online gambling, cyberbullying, worship practices, and adolescent moral problems, shows that lesson planning involves the transformation of religious content into relevant pedagogical experiences. Therefore, the pedagogical competence of PAI teachers should be understood as an integrative ability that combines content mastery, understanding of learners, instructional strategy, and moral orientation in learning design [36], [37].

The teacher's practice of conducting cognitive and non-cognitive diagnostic assessments before preparing lesson plans also shows that student understanding becomes the starting point of pedagogical planning. This finding supports the principle of constructive alignment, which emphasizes that learning objectives, teaching activities, and assessment must be aligned with what students are expected to understand and perform [38], [39]. In the context of this study, the teacher's diagnostic assessment was used to identify students' prior knowledge, learning styles, interests, and socio-cultural backgrounds before formulating learning objectives and selecting learning strategies. This practice indicates that lesson planning was not designed uniformly, but adjusted to students' readiness and learning needs. Such an approach is also consistent with differentiated instruction, which argues that teachers need to respond to student diversity by adjusting content, process, product, and learning environment [40]. Thus, the finding confirms that pedagogical competence in PAI lesson planning requires teachers to understand students not merely as recipients of religious knowledge, but as learners with different backgrounds, abilities, and levels of religious understanding.

The findings also show that the teacher's ability to translate the Merdeka Curriculum into operational lesson planning became a central aspect of pedagogical competence. The teacher analyzed Learning Outcomes, formulated Learning Objectives, and organized the Flow of Learning Objectives before selecting materials, methods, media, and assessments. This process reflects backward design principles, which state that effective lesson planning begins with identifying desired learning outcomes, determining evidence of learning, and then designing instructional activities [41]. In this study, the teacher did not merely follow textbook sequences, but planned learning based on expected competencies and students' needs. This finding is also in line with Tyler's curriculum rationale, which emphasizes that educational planning must begin with clear objectives,

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followed by the selection of learning experiences, organization of learning activities, and evaluation [42]–[44]. Therefore, the teacher's planning practice illustrates that curriculum implementation requires teachers to act as curriculum interpreters and designers, not merely as curriculum users.

Another important finding is that the PAI teacher used student-centered methods, including Problem-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning, Discovery Learning, discussion, and case-based learning. This indicates that the teacher attempted to move PAI learning from a transmission-oriented model to a more active and reflective learning model. This finding is supported by Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes that learning develops through interaction, dialogue, and social mediation. In PAI learning, discussion, problem solving, and collaborative activities can help students internalize religious values through social interaction and reflection. Moreover, the use of problem-based and project-based methods is consistent with the view that meaningful learning occurs when students actively connect new knowledge with prior experiences and real-life contexts. Therefore, the teacher's method selection demonstrates an effort to make PAI learning more dialogical, contextual, and relevant to students' lives [45]–[47].

The findings further reveal that the use of media and learning resources became an important part of PAI lesson planning. The teacher combined conventional resources, such as textbooks and the Qur'an, with digital and visual media, including videos, infographics, Canva, and interactive applications. This finding supports the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge framework, which emphasizes that effective technology integration requires teachers to understand the relationship among content, pedagogy, and technology [48], [49]. In the context of PAI learning, media are not merely supplementary tools but can help make abstract religious concepts more concrete, visual, and understandable for students. However, the findings also show that limited digital facilities, such as the availability of projectors, may hinder the optimal implementation of media-based planning. This suggests that teacher competence must be supported by institutional readiness, because pedagogical innovation cannot be fully realized when infrastructure is limited.

The problems identified in this study, such as adaptation to the Merdeka Curriculum, preparation of teaching modules, development of authentic assessment rubrics, limited time, workload, and student diversity, indicate that lesson planning is a complex professional task. Teachers are not only required to understand curriculum documents, but also to translate them into operational, contextual, and assessable learning designs. This finding aligns with Ball, Thames, and Phelps who argue that teaching requires specialized professional knowledge that enables teachers to interpret content, anticipate student difficulties, and design appropriate instructional responses [50]. In the context of PAI, this complexity becomes even stronger because teachers must integrate cognitive, affective, and practical religious dimensions. Therefore, the problems faced by the teacher in lesson planning should not be interpreted simply as individual limitations, but as evidence that pedagogical planning requires sustained professional support, adequate time, and a supportive institutional environment.

The study also found that assessment planning was one of the most important and challenging aspects of PAI lesson planning. The teacher used formative assessment,

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summative assessment, self-reflection, practice, projects, grids, and rubrics to measure students' knowledge, attitudes, and religious skills. This finding is consistent with Black and Wiliam's argument that assessment is most powerful when it is used to support learning, not merely to measure final achievement [51]. It is also supported by Brookhart, who emphasizes that rubrics can clarify learning expectations and support more transparent assessment when they are well designed [52]. In PAI learning, assessment is particularly important because teachers need to measure not only students' cognitive understanding of religious concepts, but also their moral attitudes and worship practices. Thus, authentic assessment becomes a necessary component of pedagogical competence in PAI lesson planning.

The findings on teacher professional development show that the teacher improved his pedagogical competence through independent learning, participation in MGMP, workshops, online training, collaboration with colleagues, school supervision, and reflective practice based on students' feedback. This confirms that pedagogical competence is not static, but develops through continuous learning and professional interaction. Desimone argues that effective professional development should be content-focused, active, coherent, sustained, and supported by collective participation [53]. Similarly, Borko emphasizes that teacher learning is situated in practice and influenced by the interaction between teachers, professional development activities, and school context [54]. In this study, the teacher's participation in professional communities and collaboration with other teachers provided opportunities to review lesson plans, align learning objectives, and improve assessment instruments. Therefore, the development of pedagogical competence requires both individual initiative and collective professional support.

Reflection also emerged as an important mechanism for improving lesson planning. The teacher used students' responses and classroom experiences as input for revising teaching strategies and improving future planning. This finding is consistent with Schön's concept of the reflective practitioner, which highlights the importance of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action in professional practice. It is also supported by Loughran who argues that reflective practice helps teachers understand their teaching decisions and improve instructional quality. In this study, reflection was seen when the teacher adjusted the method for Qur'an memorization after students experienced difficulties and when students suggested the need for more practice, visual media, and real-life examples. This indicates that lesson planning is not a fixed document, but a dynamic process that can be revised based on classroom realities and students' learning needs.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that PAI teachers' pedagogical competence in lesson planning is formed through the interaction of curriculum understanding, student diagnosis, contextual material selection, active learning methods, media planning, assessment design, and continuous professional development. These findings contribute to the understanding that PAI lesson planning should not be reduced to administrative preparation, because it involves pedagogical decision-making that directly affects the quality of religious learning. The study also extends existing discussions on teacher competence by showing that in Islamic Religious Education, lesson planning has a

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dual function: ensuring instructional effectiveness and supporting the internalization of Islamic values in students' daily lives. Therefore, strengthening PAI teachers' pedagogical competence requires not only training in curriculum and teaching documents, but also sustained support for differentiated instruction, authentic assessment, reflective practice, collegial collaboration, and school-based pedagogical supervision.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the pedagogical competence of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher in lesson planning at SMAN 5 Karawang was reflected in the ability to understand students' characteristics, interpret the Merdeka Curriculum, formulate learning objectives, select contextual materials, determine student-centered instructional methods, plan learning resources, and design appropriate assessments. These findings indicate that PAI lesson planning should not be understood merely as an administrative requirement, but as a reflective, contextual, and student-centered pedagogical process that connects curriculum demands with students' learning needs.

The study also found that lesson planning was influenced by challenges related to curriculum adaptation, teaching document preparation, time and workload, learning facilities, and student diversity. The teacher responded to these challenges through continuous professional learning, collaboration with colleagues, school-based supervision, and reflective improvement based on classroom experiences and students' feedback. Therefore, strengthening pedagogical competence requires both individual professional development and sustained institutional support.

The findings of this study should be interpreted within the specific context of SMAN 5 Karawang. As a single-school case study involving one PAI teacher and two student informants, the findings cannot be broadly generalized to other teachers or schools. Nevertheless, the study provides a contextual understanding of how pedagogical competence is applied and developed in PAI lesson planning within the Merdeka Curriculum. Future studies involving more schools, teachers, and students are needed to provide broader and comparative evidence.

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