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The Competence of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Designing Learning Media Based on the Independent Curriculum in Junior High Schools

*Syarifah Rahmah**

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Lhokseumawe, Lhokseumawe, Indonesia
*Correspondence: E-mail: rahmah@iainlhokseumawe.ac.id

A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers in designing learning media based on the independent curriculum in junior high schools. It aims to describe teachers' roles in designing media, evaluate their use of curriculum-based tools, and identify obstacles they encounter in implementation. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were gathered through interviews, observation, and documentation. The findings indicate that although some teachers demonstrate planning and adaptation skills, their implementation remains incomplete and lacks systematic collaboration and innovation. Media designed often lack variation and evaluation, and collaboration with colleagues is minimal. These challenges point to a gap between expected competencies and actual classroom practices. The study concludes that continuous professional development and administrative support are crucial for maximizing the impact of the Independent Curriculum. It contributes to improving the quality of religious education through better media design aligned with student needs and curricular goals.

A R T I C L E   I N F O

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a developing country, continues to strive for progress across all sectors, particularly in education. The Indonesian government aims to enhance national welfare by investing in the development of professional educators. According to Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 39, paragraph 2, educators must be professional individuals responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating student learning outcomes (Alwasilah, 2013). Professional educators must also serve the community and act as role models in higher education settings.

Indonesian Law No. 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers further emphasizes that teachers must demonstrate competence across cognitive and behavioral dimensions to be recognized as professionals (Muhammadiah *et al*., 2022). These competencies are codified in Article 8 and include pedagogical, social, personal, and professional capabilities, which are achieved through participation in formal professional development programs.

The government has launched the Guru Penggerak (Driving Teacher) program to enhance teacher competencies beyond the traditional four. Driving teachers are expected to be leaders in curriculum implementation and innovation. As stipulated in Regulation No. 26 of 2022 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, driving teachers are educators who have completed specialized training and passed rigorous assessments to obtain certification (Fadilla & Wulandari, 2023).

Driving teachers are tasked not only with teaching but also with mentoring colleagues, leading educational innovation, and strengthening the profile of Pancasila students—a key component of the Independent Curriculum. These teachers are envisioned as pioneers of pedagogical transformation, promoting creativity, collaboration, and the use of technology to support learning (Hayu *et al*., 2024).

To fulfill this role effectively, driving teachers must design engaging and student-centered learning experiences. Learning media are critical tools in this process, serving to bridge content with students' needs. The design and application of appropriate media can enhance understanding, increase motivation, and support differentiated instruction. The Independent Curriculum encourages the use of digital media, project-based learning, and interdisciplinary approaches, all of which require teachers to adapt their methods and tools accordingly (Valentia, 2023).

However, field observations suggest that the role of driving teachers has not been fully realized. Many have not established learning communities, failed to design diverse and innovative media, and have shown inconsistent collaboration with peers. In some cases, teachers rely on generic digital content and do not evaluate the effectiveness of their media (Jannah *et al*., 2022). There is also a lack of sustained monitoring from local education authorities, contributing to uneven implementation.

Given these conditions, it is essential to examine the extent to which Islamic Religious Education teachers, particularly those certified as driving teachers, have fulfilled their roles in designing media that align with the Independent Curriculum. Understanding their competencies, practices, and challenges can inform future professional development strategies and policy interventions.

The purpose of this study is to assess the competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers in designing learning media based on the Independent Curriculum in junior high schools. The novelty lies in evaluating certified driving teachers' real-world implementation of curriculum-aligned media design. This research is expected to contribute to improving

instructional quality, supporting curriculum reform, and advancing the goals of student-centered religious education in Indonesia.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach, aiming to explore and describe the competencies of Islamic Religious Education teachers in designing learning media based on the Independent Curriculum. We conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Lhokseumawe, Indonesia on April 2024. The qualitative method was chosen to allow an in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences and practices within their natural school settings, without any manipulation or experimental intervention (Pyo *et al.*, 2023).

The descriptive approach was utilized to examine current conditions, behaviors, and perceptions related to the design and implementation of learning media. The findings were presented narratively to provide rich contextual insights, rather than generalized statistical outcomes.

Three main techniques were used to collect data:

(i)   Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Islamic Religious Education teachers certified as driving teachers, as well as school administrators. These interviews facilitated direct interaction, enabling the researchers to gather detailed personal perspectives and insights.

(ii)   Observation: The researchers conducted participant observations in classrooms where the learning media were being implemented. This involved direct involvement in classroom activities to observe teaching practices and media usage in real time (Eigenbrodt *et al.*, 2022).

(iii) Documentation: Supporting data were collected from teaching modules, lesson plans, digital media files, and school records. These documents provided evidence of media design processes and teaching materials used during instruction.

The data analysis process followed the stages proposed by Miles and Huberman:

(i)   Data condensation: Summarizing and selecting relevant information from interviews, observations, and documents.

(ii)   Data display: Organizing data into structured descriptions to facilitate understanding.

(iii) Conclusion drawing and verification: Interpreting the data to derive meaningful conclusions aligned with the research objectives.

Through this methodological framework, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive and accurate depiction of the teachers' competencies, challenges, and practices in implementing curriculum-aligned learning media in Islamic Religious Education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Designing Learning Media Based on the Merdeka Curriculum

The driving teacher who has been equipped with very many additional competencies from his competence as a professional teacher, the driving teacher also has a very large role besides carrying out his duties in learning, as well as the Islamic religious education driving teacher at Junior high school who has carried out his role as a driving teacher, namely being a coach and mentor for other teachers related to teacher self-development, such as how to make concrete actions in PMM and filling out e-performance, this is done at the request of fellow teachers. Then the Islamic religious education driving teacher at the Junior high school has also provided a space for discussion with stakeholders related to school programs and solving

problems at school. He is also given additional duties in addition to being an Islamic religious education teacher, namely as head of Administration, and also often becomes the head of the committee for activities in his school.

One of the competencies that a driving teacher must have concerning his or her role in implementing student-centered learning is to plan learning according to the characteristics and needs of students. Planning learning here includes designing or selecting appropriate learning media to be used in learning. All material taught to students requires media as an intermediary for delivery so that students can easily understand it, but not all media are suitable for all materials. This is where teacher competence is needed in choosing media or designing learning media.

3.2. Planning Learning Media Based on the Independent Curriculum

Islamic Religious Education teachers who hold the status of certified driving teachers are expected to design learning media that align with student needs and the Independent Curriculum. At SMP Negeri 4 Lhokseumawe, the teacher interviewed (TM) reported consistently developing lesson plans and selecting appropriate media. These media were documented in the teaching modules and observed during instruction on topics such as ghibah (backbiting), where TM used PowerPoint slides and videos downloaded from YouTube.

However, the range of media used was limited. The materials lacked diversity and innovation, relying mainly on slide presentations. While the intent to plan effectively was evident, the execution did not fully reflect the flexibility and creativity encouraged in the Independent Curriculum (Fatimah, 2021).

3.3. Collaboration in Media Design

Driving teachers are expected to initiate collaboration with fellow educators to foster innovation and professional growth. TM had previously established a teacher study group aimed at collaborative media design. Nevertheless, the initiative was not sustained due to a lack of interest from non-driving teachers, who did not perceive a shared responsibility. As a result, collaboration remained informal and reactive; TM provided guidance only when specifically requested.

According to the vice principal (MN), TM maintained leadership in supporting peers but did not operate within a structured, ongoing learning community. This suggests a gap between policy expectations and school-level implementation (Dwiki *et al.*, 2024).

3.4. Reviewing and Aligning Materials with Media

Effective learning media must be selected based on the compatibility with content and the learners' characteristics. TM reported reviewing materials and aligning media accordingly. Observations confirmed that the videos and presentations used matched the lesson topics. However, students appeared disengaged due to monotonous presentation and delivery styles, indicating that while alignment existed, engagement strategies were lacking.

MN confirmed that TM matched materials to appropriate media but emphasized that such alignment was not consistently implemented across all topics. This finding reinforces the need for both content alignment and delivery effectiveness (Mulyosari *et al.*, 2023).

3.5. Adapting Media to Student Characteristics

Driving teachers must recognize and respond to individual student learning styles. TM stated that he diagnosed students' characteristics through initial assessments and attempted

to tailor media accordingly. MN corroborated this, noting that TM showed concern for student diversity. However, not all learning materials were adjusted based on these characteristics.

This partial adaptation highlights a missed opportunity to fully personalize instruction. Effective media design should integrate diagnostic data with media selection to ensure inclusive, responsive pedagogy (Winalda, 2022).

3.6. Designing Media for All Instructional Content

The Independent Curriculum encourages teachers to design media across all content areas to stimulate meaningful learning. TM acknowledged the existence of various media formats—digital, print, and visual—but admitted to using only a limited selection. He relied primarily on Canva for creating slides and downloading videos.

MN noted that TM was capable of designing diverse media but had not done so comprehensively. This limitation reflects a broader issue of insufficient time, training, or motivation to explore alternative formats such as interactive simulations, gamified content, or student-generated media (Pratiwi & Meilani, 2018).

3.7. Evaluating Learning Media

Evaluation is critical to determine the effectiveness and quality of learning media. TM confessed to never evaluating his media, using them immediately upon completion without reflection or revision. He was also unaware of standard evaluation criteria, such as content relevance, instructional value, and technical quality (Satriawan, 2023).

The absence of media evaluation contradicts the competency expectations for driving teachers. It suggests the need for professional development focused on instructional design and reflective teaching practices.

3.8. Synthesis and Implications

The findings reveal that Islamic Religious Education driving teachers have partially fulfilled their responsibilities in designing learning media aligned with the Independent Curriculum. While there is evidence of basic planning and individual initiative, broader goals such as collaboration, comprehensive media development, and evaluation remain unmet.

This incomplete implementation may be attributed to several factors:
(i)   Lack of sustained support from local education authorities.
(ii) Weak peer collaboration frameworks.
(iii) Limited exposure to modern media tools and evaluation techniques.

To address these issues, schools should strengthen mentoring systems, promote collaborative professional learning communities, and ensure periodic monitoring of driving teachers' performance. These measures will enhance teacher competence, support curriculum goals, and improve the overall quality of religious education in junior high schools.

3.9. Implications for Policy and Practice

This study provides several important implications for both educational policy and classroom practice, particularly in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum through the role of Islamic Religious Education driving teachers.

Policy implications are in the following:
(i)   Reinforcement of Post-Certification Monitoring. The Ministry of Education and local education authorities must implement structured follow-up systems to ensure that

certified driving teachers continue to fulfill their expanded responsibilities. Without sustained oversight, the transformative goals of the Guru Penggerak program risk becoming symbolic rather than practical.

(ii) Revision of Competency Frameworks. Current competency frameworks for driving teachers may need revision to explicitly integrate requirements for collaborative practices, media evaluation competencies, and context-based media adaptation. These should be embedded in both certification standards and school performance metrics.

(iii) Budget Allocation for Media Development. Educational policy should mandate and fund the procurement of tools, platforms, and training resources to support teacher-designed digital learning media. This includes access to software licenses, internet connectivity, and multimedia production tools, especially in under-resourced schools.

Practical implications are in the following:

(i) Professional Learning Culture. Schools must cultivate a collaborative teaching culture where driving teachers lead by example, mentor peers, and engage in shared lesson planning and resource development. Encouraging inter-teacher dialogue can multiply the impact of individual innovations.

(ii) Integration of Reflective Teaching Practices. Teachers should incorporate regular self-assessment and peer review mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of their learning media. Embedding evaluation into routine practice can enhance media quality and student engagement.

(iii) Contextualization of Media Use. Media should be adapted not only to curriculum goals but also to student profiles and local realities. Driving teachers need to consider student learning styles, accessibility needs, and socio-cultural contexts when designing or selecting instructional media.

These implications suggest that the success of curriculum reform depends not only on teacher competence but also on system-wide support, responsive policies, and a commitment to sustainable professional growth. Aligning policy frameworks with classroom realities will bridge the gap between curriculum vision and teaching practice.

4. CONCLUSION

This study explored the competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers in designing learning media based on the Independent Curriculum in junior high schools in Lhokseumawe City. The findings revealed that although driving teachers demonstrated initial competence in planning and designing learning media, their implementation remained incomplete and inconsistent with the intended standards of the Independent Curriculum.

Teachers had developed lesson plans and selected media that aligned with instructional content; however, the variety and depth of media design were limited. Collaborative efforts, a key component of the driving teacher role, were attempted but not sustained due to a lack of engagement from colleagues. Furthermore, while some adjustments were made based on student characteristics, these were not applied consistently across all materials. Critically, the evaluation of learning media (a fundamental step in ensuring instructional effectiveness) was absent.

The competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers in fulfilling their expanded roles as driving teachers requires ongoing support, structured collaboration, and targeted professional development. Strengthening these areas is essential for achieving the goals of the Independent Curriculum and improving the quality of religious education in Indonesia's secondary schools.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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