

Teacher Competency Development Assistance In Improving The Quality Of Learning In Elementary Madrasah

Sri Haningsih, Muhamad Syarif Hidayatulloh, Anggi Arif Fudin Setiadi, Faizah
Wahyu Ardlina, Ma'rifah Nur Najma

Universitas Islam Indonesia

srihaningsih@uii.ac.id*

Abstract

Teacher competence plays a significant role in improving the quality of learning in primary education institutions, including Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. However, many teachers still face challenges in designing effective learning, implementing innovative teaching strategies, and conducting meaningful learning evaluations. This community service program aims to assist teachers in developing pedagogical competencies to improve the quality of learning in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The program employed a mentoring-based approach consisting of training, classroom mentoring, and reflective evaluation. The participants were teachers at a Madrasah Ibtidaiyah who were actively involved in the learning process. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation of mentoring activities. The results indicate that the mentoring program improved teachers' ability to design lesson plans, implement active learning strategies, and conduct learning assessments. In addition, the mentoring process increased teachers' professional confidence and fostered collaborative learning. This program demonstrates that mentoring-based professional development can become an effective strategy for strengthening teacher competence and improving learning quality in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah.

Keywords: Teacher competency; Professional Mentoring; Participatory Action Research; Instructional Coaching; Elementary Madrasah

INTRODUCTION

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) is a primary educational institution that plays a strategic role in building the foundation of students' academic abilities, character, and the internalization of Islamic values (Abrori & Hadi, 2020). In the context of Islamic elementary education, the quality of the learning process serves as the primary indicator of a madrasah's success in producing a generation that is not only intellectually superior but also possesses religious character, creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability to the changing times. Results from an interview with the Principal of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nurul Ulum Kretek Bantul Yogyakarta indicate that the quality of learning is largely determined by the competence of teachers as the primary actors in the educational process. Therefore, teachers are required to continuously adapt to technological advancements and curriculum dynamics to address the challenges of modern education (Hanifah Nur et al., 2025).

However, the development of MI teachers' competencies faces several complex challenges, particularly in pedagogical, professional, social, and spiritual domains (Dinata & Kuswadi, 2025). These challenges include inconsistency in maintaining professional commitment, increasing administrative demands, rapid curriculum changes requiring immediate adaptation, and limited access to professional development programs such as training, workshops, and technical guidance activities (Dinata et al., 2025). These conditions indicate that improving teacher competence cannot rely solely on formal training programs but requires a more contextual, sustainable, and needs-based empowerment approach.

Empirical data reveal that eleven MI teachers who participated in training programs demonstrated relatively adequate pedagogical and professional competencies and were capable of creating effective and meaningful learning environments (Rianti et al., 2024). Nevertheless, only a small proportion of these teachers were able to optimally implement technology-based learning innovations, as evidenced by the limited number of digital learning products, such as instructional videos, produced (Muafiah et al., 2022; Rogers, 2006). Furthermore, preliminary observations and discussions with the partner madrasah indicate several persistent issues in classroom practice, including limitations in designing systematic lesson plans, the predominance of conventional teaching methods, and the lack of reflective practices in teaching. These issues have resulted in suboptimal learning processes and limited variation in students' classroom activities.

This condition highlights a significant gap between expected teacher competencies and actual classroom practices (Yanti et al., 2024). Previous studies have predominantly focused on workshop-based training approaches that are typically one-directional, short-term, and lack sustainability. Such approaches are often not accompanied by systematic mentoring mechanisms, resulting in low levels of implementation of training outcomes in real classroom settings. Moreover, top-down approaches that do not adequately consider the local context of madrasahs further reduce the effectiveness of teacher professional development programs (Soetrisno & Ali, 2025).

In response to these challenges, a more contextual, participatory, and practice-oriented approach is needed, namely through a sustainable mentoring model. Mentoring is considered an effective strategy as it goes beyond knowledge transfer and emphasizes a collaborative and reflective process that enables teachers to develop their instructional practices in alignment with the specific needs and context of the madrasah (Haningsih, 2013; Haningsih, 2024). This approach is theoretically grounded in several contemporary educational frameworks, including constructivist theory, which views learning as an active process of knowledge construction through experience; social learning theory, which highlights the importance of interaction and collaboration; and the concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLC), which promotes collective reflection and continuous improvement in teaching practices. Additionally, Kolb's experiential learning theory and the instructional coaching model provide a practical framework for implementing mentoring through cycles of experience, reflection, conceptualization, and experimentation.

From a policy perspective, strengthening teacher competencies aligns with government regulations, particularly the Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Number 1 of 2025 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of In-Service Teacher Professional Education Programs. This policy emphasizes the importance of continuous and practice-based teacher professional development. Furthermore, recent curriculum reforms have integrated digital technology into the learning process starting from the primary education level, including MI (Fauziah & Rohmawati, 2025), thereby reinforcing the urgency of enhancing teachers' capacity to effectively utilize digital learning tools.

Based on these problems and theoretical foundations, this community service program aims to: (1) develop teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies through a sustainable mentoring model; (2) improve the quality of innovative, contextual, and student-centered learning; (3) implement reflective and

collaborative teaching practices; and (4) produce an applicable and replicable mentoring model within the madrasah context. Thus, this program is not only oriented toward improving individual teacher capacity but also toward strengthening the institutional learning system.

The novelty of this study lies in the development of a practice-based mentoring model that integrates an instructional coaching approach with Islamic educational values within the context of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. In addition, the proposed approach emphasizes collaboration, reflection, and contextual relevance as the core principles of teacher professional development. This model is designed based on real needs in the field and is expected to bridge the gap between theory and classroom practice. Therefore, this study contributes both theoretically to the development of Islamic education studies and practically by providing a sustainable, adaptive, and implementable mentoring model for madrasah settings.

METHODS

This community service activity employed a *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) approach, which was selected due to its alignment to enhance teachers' competencies through a collaborative, reflective, and sustainable mentoring process (Salviana et al., 2022). This approach enables teachers to actively participate not only as subjects but also as partners in transforming instructional practices, thereby emphasizing practical change rather than mere knowledge transfer. Conceptually, PAR is grounded in iterative cycles consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection, which are conducted collaboratively between the service team and participating teachers.

The participants in this program were eleven teachers from Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nurul Ulum Kretek Bantul, Yogyakarta, who were selected purposively based on their involvement in prior training activities and their readiness to engage in intensive mentoring. The selection process considered variations in teaching experience, educational background, and identified professional development needs, which were initially explored through interviews with the school principal and preliminary classroom observations.

Data were collected using complementary techniques, including participatory classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to capture changes in instructional practices before and after the mentoring process, while interviews were used to explore teachers' experiences, perceptions, and reflections throughout the program. Documentation, including lesson plans and digital learning products developed by the teachers, was utilized to support data validity through relevant empirical evidence.

The implementation procedure followed the PAR cycle, beginning with the planning phase through problem identification and needs assessment, followed by the action phase involving workshops and mentoring based on an *instructional coaching* approach (Baum et al., 2006). This was continued with observation of classroom implementation and collective reflection to evaluate outcomes and formulate continuous improvements. These cycles were conducted iteratively to ensure the gradual and contextual development of teachers' competencies.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using thematic analysis techniques, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data from multiple sources were triangulated to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. The analysis focused on identifying changes in teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies, patterns of innovative teaching practices, and reflective processes emerging throughout the mentoring activities.

The selection of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach aligns with the scope and orientation of Cokroaminoto Journal of Primary Education (CJPE), which emphasizes practice-oriented educational interventions, teacher professional development, and the improvement of learning quality in

primary education contexts. By positioning teachers as active participants and co-researchers, the PAR approach supports sustainable capacity building and contextual transformation of instructional practices (Nur & Nur, 2024). Therefore, this methodology not only produces academic insights but also generates practical impacts, such as improved learning quality and strengthened teacher autonomy in developing their professional practices. All participants were informed about the objectives and procedures of the program and voluntarily agreed to participate. Permission for data collection was obtained from the school principal of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Nurul Ulum. The mentoring activities were conducted with respect for participants' professional autonomy, confidentiality, and institutional values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Sustainability of Learning Quality as a Function of Institutional Capacity and Continuous Commitment

The strong institutional foundation of learning quality. Based on interview data, the school principal emphasized that the overall quality of learning at MI Nurul Ulum is already well-established, as evidenced by the achievement of an "A" accreditation in 2024. This is reflected in the statement: *"The quality of learning at MI Nurul Ulum is already good... achieving an A accreditation with an excellent rating."* However, maintaining this quality requires sustained commitment. As stated: *"It is necessary to remain consistent (istiqomah) in maintaining this quality so it can continue to improve."* This finding suggests that educational quality is not merely a formal achievement but also a matter of sustainability.

The findings indicate that MI Nurul Ulum has established a strong foundation of learning quality, as evidenced by its "A" accreditation status. However, this study extends the understanding that educational quality is not static but dynamic and highly dependent on the sustainability of practice. The notion of *istiqomah* (consistency) emphasized by the school principal highlights that maintaining quality requires continuous commitment beyond formal standards. Analytically, this suggests that educational quality is shaped not only by structural indicators but also by organizational culture, including collective commitment, professional discipline, and consistency in instructional practices. Thus, institutional capacity alone is insufficient without a strong culture of quality. Sustainable learning quality emerges from the interaction between structural readiness and cultural reinforcement within the institution.

The Competence Practice Gap as a Structural Challenge in Teacher Professional Development

The concerns structural challenges in teacher competency development. Although teachers possess adequate qualifications and most have completed professional certification programs, the main challenge lies in maintaining consistency and commitment. This is illustrated by the statement: *"The biggest challenge is consistency and maintaining commitment... along with administrative demands and curriculum changes."* Financial limitations also play a role: *"The delay in operational funding affects teachers' motivation, making it fluctuate."* These findings indicate that professional development is influenced not only by training but also by systemic factors.

A key finding of this study is the significant gap between teachers' competencies and their classroom practices. Although teachers possess adequate qualifications and digital literacy, the implementation of innovative teaching strategies and authentic assessment remains limited. This finding indicates that professional development should not focus solely on knowledge acquisition but must also emphasize practice transformation. Structural constraints such as administrative workload, curriculum changes, and limited access to continuous training further exacerbate this gap. Moreover, this study reinforces critiques of conventional training models that are short-term and lack follow-up support. Such models often fail to produce meaningful

changes in teaching behavior. Therefore, a more contextual and practice-oriented approach is required to bridge the gap between knowledge and implementation.

The Effectiveness of Practice-Based Mentoring in Enhancing Learning Quality and Student Character

It highlights the gap between competence and classroom practice. Although approximately 80% of teachers demonstrate adequate digital literacy, its implementation remains limited. As stated: *“Around 80% of teachers have sufficient digital literacy... but it still needs improvement.”* Furthermore, authentic assessment remains underdeveloped: *“Mastery of authentic assessment needs improvement due to limited training.”* This reflects a clear *implementation gap* between knowledge and practice.

The effectiveness of practice-based mentoring. The mentoring program has significantly contributed to improving teachers’ competencies and instructional practices. This is evident in the statement: *“Teachers have become more open-minded, motivated, and confident.”* Additionally, participants emphasized the effectiveness of combining theory and practice: *“It is more effective when training includes both theoretical and practical sessions.”* These findings support the effectiveness of *instructional coaching* in bridging theory and practice. The impact on students’ character and learning quality. The program contributes not only to teacher development but also to student outcomes. This is reflected in the statement: *“Students are becoming more disciplined in worship... and negative behaviors such as bullying are decreasing.”* This indicates that value-based learning has a direct impact on character development.

The study demonstrates that practice-based mentoring, particularly through PAR and instructional coaching, is highly effective in improving both teacher competence and learning quality. This approach emphasizes experiential learning, reflection, and collaboration, enabling teachers to actively engage in improving their practices. The effectiveness of this approach lies in its participatory nature, where teachers are positioned as active agents of change. This fosters professional awareness, motivation, and confidence in implementing innovative teaching strategies. Furthermore, the integration of Islamic values into learning serves as a distinctive strength of the madrasah context. These values are embedded not only conceptually but also through daily practices, contributing significantly to students’ character development, including increased discipline and reduced negative behaviors. In addition, the mentoring process contributes to the development of a collaborative and reflective school culture, which may evolve into a professional learning community. Thus, practice-based mentoring not only enhances individual teacher performance but also strengthens institutional learning systems.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that a PAR-based mentoring approach is effective in enhancing teacher competence and improving learning quality contextually and sustainably. These results align with the principles of *experiential learning* and *professional learning communities*, which emphasize reflection, collaboration, and practice-based professional development.

Table 1. Findings Based on Community Service Objectives

Objectives	Key Findings	Indicators of Change	Empirical Evidence (Field Data)
Development of teachers’ pedagogical and professional competencies	Improvement in pedagogical skills, digital literacy, and teaching confidence	- Teachers adopt active and contextual methods - Increased use of digital media - Higher teaching confidence	Teachers became more open to innovation and motivated; around 80% demonstrate adequate digital literacy
Improvement of innovative and	Learning becomes more interactive,	- Reduced reliance on conventional methods - Increased student	Islamic values integrated through structured activities (prayer,

student-centered learning	varied, and meaningful	engagement - Integration of Islamic values in learning	memorization, short sermons) and contextual approaches
Implementation of reflective and collaborative practices	Development of reflective culture and teacher collaboration	- Teachers engage in reflective practices - Peer discussion and sharing - Emergence of a professional learning community	Teachers actively participate in discussions, evaluations, and share training outcomes with peers
Development of an applicable and replicable mentoring model	Establishment of a practice-based mentoring model (PAR + instructional coaching)	- Cyclical mentoring process - Integration of theory and practice - Adaptability to other contexts	The program is considered effective due to its practical approach and alignment with teachers' needs
Impact on student character and learning quality	Improvement in students' discipline and religious character	- Increased discipline in worship - Reduction in negative behavior - Strengthened Islamic values	Students show better discipline in congregational prayers, reduced bullying, and stronger religious character

Figure 1. Photo of Teacher Competency Development Assistance in Improving the Quality of Learning in Elementary Madrasah



Discussion

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of how learning quality in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is shaped not merely by formal institutional achievements but by the dynamic interplay between structural capacity, professional practice, and cultural commitment. While MI Nurul Ulum demonstrates a strong institutional foundation, as evidenced by its “A” accreditation, this study critically argues that such

formal recognition does not automatically translate into sustained instructional quality. Instead, the notion of *istiqomah* (consistency), as emphasized by the school leadership, reflects a deeper cultural dimension that aligns with the concept of *sustainable school improvement*. This finding resonates with the perspective that educational quality is inherently processual and must be continuously reproduced through practice, rather than being treated as a static outcome.

From a theoretical standpoint, this condition can be interpreted through the lens of organizational learning and *Professional Learning Community* (PLC) theory, which posits that sustained improvement depends on shared commitment, collective reflection, and continuous professional dialogue (Uvhagen et al., 2024; Hayden, 2022). The present study extends this framework by demonstrating that in the context of Islamic education, sustainability is not only organizational but also moral-spiritual, where commitment is reinforced through value-based orientations (Yang & Zheng, 2021). Thus, the integration of cultural-religious constructs such as *istiqomah* offers a contextual enrichment to dominant Western-centric models of school improvement.

A central contribution of this study lies in revealing the persistent gap between teacher competence and classroom practice. Although teachers possess adequate qualifications and digital literacy, the translation of these competencies into effective instructional practices remains limited. This finding supports and extends existing critiques of traditional professional development models, which tend to emphasize knowledge transmission rather than practice transformation. In line with constructivist learning theory, knowledge is not passively received but actively constructed through experience (Aprilia Mutiasari, Muhammad Mona Adha, Irma Lusi Nugraheni, 2026). Therefore, the failure to translate competence into practice reflects a lack of experiential engagement in professional learning processes. Moreover, this study highlights the role of structural constraints such as administrative workload, policy demands, and limited financial resources in mediating the effectiveness of teacher development (Dewi & Elisa, 2025). This aligns with sociocultural perspectives, particularly those influenced by Vygotskian theory, which emphasize that learning and development are situated within broader social and institutional contexts (Jeong et al., 2022; Fernyhough & Borghi, 2023). In this regard, teacher competence should not be viewed as an isolated individual attribute but as an emergent property shaped by systemic conditions (Oko-jaja, 2025). Consequently, efforts to improve teacher quality must adopt a more ecological approach that addresses both individual capacity and structural support systems.

Within this context, the implementation of *Participatory Action Research* (PAR) combined with *instructional coaching* emerges as a critical intervention that effectively bridges the gap between theory and practice (Husna, 2023). The findings demonstrate that practice-based mentoring facilitates experiential learning cycles, as conceptualized by Kolb, where teachers engage in concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Indrayani, 2020). This iterative process enables teachers to internalize new knowledge and translate it into meaningful pedagogical practices (Rahmawati Zein, 2022). Furthermore, the collaborative and reflective nature of the mentoring process aligns with the core principles of PLC, fostering a culture of shared learning and mutual support among teachers (Berny Gomulyo, 2005). Unlike conventional training models, which are often episodic and decontextualized, the PAR-based approach situates professional development within the real context of classroom practice. This not only enhances relevance but also increases the likelihood of sustained behavioral change. The study therefore provides empirical support for the argument that effective professional development must be embedded, participatory, and practice-oriented (Zainiyati, 2010).

Another significant dimension of this study is the integration of Islamic values into the learning process, which serves as both a pedagogical and cultural framework (Afrizal Nur, Hayati Bin Husein, 2025). Unlike

approaches that treat values education as an add-on component, the findings reveal that Islamic values are deeply embedded in daily practices, shaping both teacher behavior and student outcomes (Moh. Solikul Hadi, Muhammad Nuril Anam, 2021). This aligns with value-based education theories, which emphasize that character formation is most effective when values are internalized through habitual practice rather than merely taught cognitively (Hadi et al., 2025). Importantly, the study demonstrates that such integration has tangible impacts on student character, including increased discipline in religious practices and a reduction in negative behaviors such as bullying (Almeida et al., 2016). This finding contributes to the growing body of literature on character education by providing evidence that value-based learning, when implemented systematically and contextually, can produce measurable behavioral outcomes (James, 2009). Moreover, in the context of madrasah education, the integration of religious practices also enhances the institution's social legitimacy and attractiveness to the community, thereby linking pedagogical quality with institutional sustainability (Mahbub et al., 2024).

Taken together, these findings suggest that improving learning quality in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah requires a holistic approach that integrates institutional capacity, teacher professional development, and value-based pedagogy. The study contributes to the literature by proposing a contextualized model of teacher empowerment that combines PAR, instructional coaching, and Islamic values. This model not only addresses the competence practice gap but also fosters a sustainable culture of learning within the institution. In conclusion, this study advances the discourse on educational improvement by emphasizing that sustainable quality is achieved not through isolated interventions, but through the alignment of structural, pedagogical, and cultural dimensions. Future research may further explore how this model can be scaled and adapted across different madrasah contexts, as well as how digital technologies can be more deeply integrated into value-based learning frameworks.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that improving learning quality in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah requires a holistic and integrative approach that goes beyond formal institutional achievements. While MI Nurul Ulum demonstrates a strong foundational capacity, as reflected in its accreditation status, the sustainability of learning quality is fundamentally shaped by continuous commitment, or *istiqomah*, embedded within the institutional culture. This finding highlights that educational quality is not a static outcome but a dynamic process sustained through consistent practice and collective responsibility.

A key contribution of this study lies in identifying the persistent gap between teacher competence and classroom practice. Although teachers possess adequate qualifications and digital literacy, the translation of these competencies into effective instructional practices remains limited due to structural constraints, including administrative demands, policy pressures, and limited access to continuous professional development. This underscores the need to reconceptualize teacher development as a systemic process that integrates individual capacity with institutional support.

The implementation of a *Participatory Action Research* (PAR)-based mentoring model combined with instructional coaching has proven to be an effective strategy in addressing this gap. By emphasizing experiential learning, reflection, and collaboration, this approach enables teachers to translate knowledge into practice contextually and sustainably. Furthermore, the integration of Islamic values into the learning process strengthens both pedagogical practices and character education, contributing to measurable improvements in student discipline and behavior.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the discourse on educational improvement by contextualizing established frameworks such as experiential learning, sociocultural theory, and professional learning

communities within the setting of Islamic education. Practically, it offers an applicable and replicable model of teacher empowerment that aligns with the needs of madrasah institutions. However, this study is limited to a single institutional context, which may affect the generalizability of its findings. Future research is therefore recommended to explore the scalability of this model across diverse madrasah settings and to examine the integration of digital innovation within value-based learning frameworks.

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