As - S A B I Q U N
Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini

p-ISSN: 2656-4912
e-ISSN: 2656-4785

Terindeks: SINTA 4, Dimensions, Scilit, Crossref, Garuda, Google Scholar, etc

https://doi.org/10.36088/assabiqun.v8i6.6585

Analyzing Teachers' Pedagogical Competence in Akidah Akhlak Instruction for Ninth-Grade Students at MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat

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Abstract

Although teachers' pedagogical competence is widely recognized as central to instructional quality, empirical research examining it as an integrated process in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction, particularly at the Grade IX level in Islamic junior secondary schools, remains limited. This study aims to analyze how teachers enact pedagogical competence in planning, implementing, adapting, and evaluating *Akidah Akhlak* instruction. A descriptive qualitative design was employed at MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Dompu, Indonesia, involving one school principal, three Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* teachers, and 20 Grade IX students. Data were collected through non-participant observation, structured interviews, and documentation and analyzed through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, with source and method triangulation used to strengthen the analysis. The findings identify nine interconnected dimensions of pedagogical competence: understanding students' characteristics; applying learning theories and instructional principles; operationalizing the curriculum; facilitating educative learning; integrating information and communication technology; communicating effectively, empathetically, and respectfully; conducting assessment; utilizing assessment results; and engaging in reflective practice. These dimensions constitute an adaptive instructional cycle in which teachers' understanding of learners informs instructional planning and implementation, while communication and assessment facilitate ongoing instructional adjustment. However, reflective practice was less systematic, and assessment results were used more consistently for remediation than for

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enrichment. The study concludes that pedagogical competence in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction operates as a context-sensitive and adaptive process rather than as a collection of isolated teaching skills. The findings contribute to understanding pedagogical competence as an integrated instructional process and underscore the need for teacher development that strengthens differentiated instruction, assessment-informed improvement, ICT integration, and systematic reflective practice. Future research should extend these findings through multi-site, longitudinal, or mixed-method designs.

Keywords: *Akidah Akhlak*; Islamic Education; Pedagogical Competence; Reflective Practice; Teacher Competence

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' pedagogical competence has become an important concern in contemporary education because the quality of teaching is closely related to teachers' capacity to understand learners, design instruction, manage classroom processes, and evaluate learning outcomes. Pedagogical competence should not be understood merely as a set of technical teaching skills, but also as an expression of teachers' professional attitudes and readiness to perform their educational responsibilities (Adıgüzel, 2017). International research further indicates that teacher competence contributes to students' learning primarily through the quality of instructional practices implemented in classrooms. Thus, pedagogical competence needs to be examined not only through teachers' knowledge but also through how that competence is translated into actual instructional practices (Jentsch et al., 2022). This perspective is particularly important because teachers' pedagogical competence has been associated with instructional quality and classroom learning processes rather than being viewed simply as an individual professional attribute.

The contemporary educational environment also requires teachers to respond to technological developments. Teachers are increasingly expected not only to possess technical skills but also to integrate technology with appropriate pedagogical strategies so that technological tools meaningfully support teaching and learning (Asad et al., 2021). Consequently, pedagogical competence involves an increasingly complex combination of understanding students, selecting appropriate instructional strategies, managing learning activities, using learning resources and technology, and assessing learning. These international developments suggest that the effectiveness of teaching depends on how

teachers transform their pedagogical knowledge into contextually appropriate classroom practices. In this sense, the analysis of teachers' competence should pay attention to the actual processes of planning, implementation, classroom management, and assessment.

Within the Indonesian educational context, similar concerns are evident, particularly in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Pedagogical competence is reflected in teachers' ability to manage learning systematically so that instructional activities are aligned with predetermined educational objectives (Hidayatullah et al., 2018). More comprehensively, pedagogical competence in PAI includes understanding students' characteristics, designing learning activities, implementing instruction, utilizing technology, assessing learning outcomes, and developing students' potential (Muslim, 2020). Moreover, effective pedagogical planning should not merely facilitate the delivery of religious content but should also encourage higher-order thinking among students (Rahmah, 2021). The importance of teachers' instructional competence is also evident in students' learning achievement, which is influenced by the interaction between the instructional process, teachers' pedagogical competence, and students' learning motivation (Wahyuningsih, 2021).

From a pedagogical perspective, teachers' competence constitutes an integral component of the ability to manage learning. It includes the capacity to apply educational approaches, strategies, methods, and techniques while adapting instruction to students' needs. Therefore, pedagogical competence extends beyond mastery of subject matter to include the ability to design and implement effective learning processes (Supinah, 2016). Similarly, Amanah et al., (2020) emphasize that pedagogical competence encompasses teachers' ability to plan and implement effective instruction, manage learning processes, and improve students' engagement and learning quality. Nurmiati, (2021) further explains that pedagogical competence involves understanding students' characteristics, managing learning according to their needs, developing their potential, and conducting assessment of both learning processes and outcomes. These perspectives provide an important conceptual basis for examining pedagogical competence through observable teaching practices.

This issue becomes particularly significant in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction because the subject is not limited to the transmission of religious knowledge. *Akidah Akhlak* learning is intended to provide religious understanding while supporting the development of students' religious attitudes through learning activities that are engaging and responsive

to students' needs (Rahman, 2018). At the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, *Akidah Akhlak* instruction involves systematic management of learning activities to achieve instructional objectives, while its effectiveness may be influenced by various supporting and inhibiting factors (Rubini, 2021).

The subject also contributes to the development of students' social concern, indicating that learning should address not only cognitive understanding of religious concepts but also the formation of attitudes and social behavior (Siswati et al., 2020). Accordingly, teachers need pedagogical competence to select instructional models that correspond to students' characteristics and the nature of the learning material (Rasmuin & Islamiyah, 2020).

The pedagogical role of the *Akidah Akhlak* teacher is therefore multidimensional. Teachers are expected to guide students' moral development through instruction, advice, responses to inappropriate behavior, and cooperation with parents and the school environment. Alfionita and Makin, (2020) conceptualizes pedagogical competence as an important dimension of teacher professionalism involving the ability to understand learners, design instruction, select appropriate strategies, and conduct learning activities that facilitate students' potential development. Within *Akidah Akhlak* instruction, this competence can also be reflected in the use of interactive learning media, which may shift learning from teacher-centered instruction toward more active student participation (Andrean & Niam, 2020). Likewise, strategies that encourage students to ask questions can increase their engagement and create greater opportunities for active participation in *Akidah Akhlak* learning (Fauziah, 2020). Khairi (2020) emphasizes that *Akidah Akhlak* learning incorporates not only theological and moral content but also theories of teaching and learning, instructional methods, strategies, approaches, media, and learning resources. Therefore, teachers at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level need to select strategies appropriate to both the characteristics of the subject matter and those of the learners (Hikmah, 2020).

This pedagogical complexity is also reflected in national policy. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia positions *Akidah Akhlak* as part of Islamic Religious Education and Arabic instruction in madrasahs. The Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* textbook is structured in accordance with KMA No. 183 of 2019 and serves as a learning resource for Madrasah Tsanawiyah students (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2020). Consequently, Grade IX teachers are required to translate curriculum objectives and

structured learning materials into classroom practices that correspond to students' developmental characteristics. This expectation is consistent with the broader role of education in the twenty-first century, in which learning is expected to contribute not only to knowledge acquisition but also to students' values and character development (Singh, 2019).

Previous studies have examined pedagogical competence among Islamic education teachers from several perspectives. Munajat, (2013) found that PAI teachers' pedagogical competence reached an average level of 71% and identified limitations in curriculum training, learning media, and professional teacher development. Hakim, (2017) reported relatively strong pedagogical competence in understanding student diversity, preparing lesson plans, implementing active learning, and conducting assessment, while highlighting the role of supervision, professional activities, and teacher development. Rijal and Tadris, (2020) specifically examined the use of learning media among PAI teachers at junior secondary schools and found that pedagogical competence was reflected in planning, implementation, and assessment using learning media, although ICT mastery, facilities, technical problems, and time remained challenges. Nurfuadi, (2020) similarly demonstrated that pedagogical competence contributes to learning quality and supports the development of students' knowledge and positive attitudes. At the institutional level, Sari and Samiha, (2020) showed that MGMP activities can function as mediators, facilitators, innovators, and evaluators in strengthening teachers' pedagogical competence.

Other research has focused on curriculum and learning-device development. Fahmi et al., (2022) found that PAI teachers' pedagogical competence in curriculum, syllabus, lesson-plan, and assessment development was generally good, although some teachers had not fully prepared instructional documents before teaching. In the local context, Anam and Wiradharma, (2022) identified the continuing need to strengthen teachers' abilities in managing learning and evaluating students in Central Lombok, providing a relevant regional context for examining pedagogical competence in West Nusa Tenggara. Meanwhile, research on *Akidah Akhlak* instruction in an MTsN in West Lombok found the use of scientific approaches, varied methods, and authentic assessment, while also identifying constraints related to students' personal conditions and teachers' limited time for moral guidance (Azra'i, 2021).

Despite these contributions, previous studies leave a clear empirical and contextual gap. Most existing research has examined teachers' pedagogical competence in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) broadly, or has isolated particular dimensions such as learning media utilization, curriculum development, teacher professional development, or institutional support (Hakim, 2017; Rijal & Tadris, 2020; Sari & Samiha, 2020; Fahmi et al., 2022). Such approaches have not sufficiently explained how pedagogical competence operates as an integrated instructional process specifically within *Akidah Akhlak* learning. In particular, limited empirical attention has been directed to the way teachers simultaneously translate pedagogical competence into lesson planning, selection of instructional strategies and media, classroom implementation, management of student differences, development of student potential, and assessment of learning outcomes. This limitation is even more evident at the Grade IX Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, where *Akidah Akhlak* learning is expected to connect religious knowledge with students' attitudes, moral development, and social behavior. Therefore, the central gap addressed by this study is the absence of a sufficiently integrated analysis of pedagogical competence specifically within Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* instruction and its concrete classroom practices in the Lombok context.

The preliminary observation at MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat on 2 June 2022 further reveals a specific empirical problem that has not been captured by previous studies. The *Akidah Akhlak* teacher had prepared learning materials, delivered instructional content, employed learning methods, and conducted assessment. However, differences were observed in the use of learning methods and media and in the extent to which instructional activities were adapted to the characteristics and learning needs of Grade IX students (Initial observation, 2 June 2022). These conditions indicate that the existence of instructional planning and assessment alone does not sufficiently demonstrate the actual quality and scope of teachers' pedagogical competence. What requires closer examination is how teachers connect these pedagogical components during the real instructional process and how they respond to students' characteristics and learning needs.

This study therefore introduces a more integrated analytical focus by examining pedagogical competence across the entire instructional cycle of Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* learning: planning, implementation, classroom management, instructional adaptation, utilization of methods and media, student engagement, and assessment. Unlike studies that concentrate on a single dimension of competence or investigate PAI teachers at a general

level, this research positions *Akidah Akhlak* instruction as the specific pedagogical context through which teachers' competence can be empirically examined.

The novelty of the study consequently lies in its context-specific and process-oriented analysis of how pedagogical competence is enacted in actual Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* classroom practice, rather than merely measuring or describing competence as a general professional qualification. The study also extends existing research by bringing together pedagogical competence theory and the distinctive educational objectives of *Akidah Akhlak*, particularly the integration of religious understanding, moral formation, student participation, and character development.

Accordingly, this study focuses on analyzing teachers' pedagogical competence in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction for ninth-grade students at MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat. Specifically, it examines how teachers plan and organize instruction, select and apply appropriate methods and media, manage classroom learning, respond to students' characteristics and needs, engage students in the learning process, and evaluate learning outcomes. Through this focus, the study seeks to produce a contextualized account of pedagogical competence as an observable and integrated classroom practice. The findings are expected to contribute empirical evidence to the literature on Islamic education by demonstrating how pedagogical competence is translated into religious and character-oriented learning at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, particularly within the educational context of Lombok.

METHODS

1. Research Approach and Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze teachers' pedagogical competence in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction for ninth-grade students at MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding educational practices, interactions, experiences, and contextual conditions as they occurred naturally in the research setting. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore phenomena through participants' perspectives and naturally occurring data rather than reducing the phenomenon to numerical measurements (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Accordingly, the study sought to obtain a

contextual description of how teachers demonstrated pedagogical competence in actual *Akidah Akhlak* instruction.

The descriptive qualitative design was used to provide a detailed account of the teacher's pedagogical practices without manipulating the learning environment. The research focused on how pedagogical competence was reflected in instructional planning, implementation, classroom management, selection of learning methods and media, adaptation to students' characteristics, and assessment. This design was consistent with qualitative inquiry, which emphasizes the interpretation of phenomena within their natural settings and the construction of meaning from multiple forms of empirical evidence (Flick, 2018; Denzin et al., 2018).

2. Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Pekat Village, Dompu Regency, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Data collection was conducted from 5 to 29 June 2022. The research site was selected because it provided a relevant context for examining teachers' pedagogical competence in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level. The study specifically focused on ninth-grade students because the research examined the implementation of pedagogical competence in Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* learning. The original research data confirmed the location and research period.

The participants consisted of the school principal, the Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* teacher, and Grade IX students. The principal provided institutional information regarding the implementation of teaching and teacher competence, while the *Akidah Akhlak* teacher provided information concerning lesson planning, instructional strategies, classroom management, learning media, and assessment. Grade IX students provided information about their experiences and participation during the learning process. The involvement of different participant groups enabled the researcher to obtain complementary perspectives concerning the phenomenon under investigation. In qualitative research, the selection of information-rich participants is important for obtaining detailed and contextually relevant evidence (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Taylor et al., 2016).

3. Researcher as the Key Instrument

The researcher served as the primary instrument in the collection and interpretation of qualitative data. The researcher directly entered the research setting, observed classroom activities, conducted interviews, collected documents, recorded field observations, and

interpreted the data. Such direct involvement was necessary because qualitative research requires researchers to engage closely with participants and the context in which the phenomenon occurs (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Denzin et al., 2018).

To facilitate systematic data collection, the researcher used an observation guide, interview guide, field notes, and documentation records. The instruments focused on the major dimensions of teachers' pedagogical competence, including instructional preparation, implementation of learning, selection of instructional methods and media, classroom management, responsiveness to students' characteristics and needs, student participation, and assessment. The researcher remained attentive to relevant information that emerged during fieldwork while maintaining consistency with the research focus.

4. Data Sources

The study used primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained directly from the school principal, the Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* teacher, and Grade IX students through interviews and classroom observations. The original research design identified these participants as the principal sources of information regarding teachers' pedagogical competence.

Secondary data were obtained from school documents and relevant instructional materials. These included information concerning the physical condition of the school, vision and mission, teachers and students, facilities and infrastructure, organizational information, and documents related to teaching practices and teacher competence. The combination of primary and secondary sources allowed the researcher to compare participants' accounts with documentary evidence and observed practices. Multiple sources are particularly important in qualitative research because they provide a broader basis for interpreting complex social and educational phenomena (Flick, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2016).

5. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through non-participant observation, interviews, and documentation. These three techniques were used complementarily to obtain a comprehensive description of pedagogical competence in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction. The use of multiple data-collection techniques enabled the researcher to examine both reported practices and actual classroom practices (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Flick, 2018).

a. Non-Participant Observation

The researcher conducted non-participant observation during *Akidah Akhlak* learning activities. The researcher did not participate directly in the instructional process but observed and recorded relevant classroom activities. The observation focused on teachers' preparation and delivery of learning, selection and application of instructional methods, use of learning media, classroom management, teacher–student interaction, student participation, adaptation to students' characteristics, and assessment practices.

Non-participant observation was important because the study examined pedagogical competence as an actual classroom practice rather than relying exclusively on teachers' statements. Field notes were used to record relevant behaviors, interactions, instructional activities, and contextual conditions. The original research data specifically identified non-participant observation as the observation technique used in the study. Observation is particularly useful in qualitative research because it allows researchers to examine social practices within their natural context (Flick, 2018; Taylor et al., 2016).

b. Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the school principal, Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* teacher, and Grade IX students. The interviews explored teachers' pedagogical competence in planning, implementing, managing, and evaluating *Akidah Akhlak* learning. Questions also addressed teachers' selection of instructional methods and media and their responses to students' characteristics and learning needs.

The research used a structured interview guide containing questions prepared before the fieldwork. The original research design explicitly stated that structured interviews were used to collect information about teachers' pedagogical competence in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction. Structured interviews provided consistency across participants while allowing the researcher to obtain information directly related to the research focus. Interviews are an important qualitative technique for accessing participants' experiences, interpretations, and explanations of social and educational practices (Taylor et al., 2016; Silverman, 2020).

c. Documentation

Documentation was used to complement observation and interview data. The researcher collected relevant documents concerning the school, teachers and students,

facilities, organizational structure, instructional activities, and materials related to teachers' pedagogical competence. Documents were examined to provide contextual information and to support comparison between documented instructional practices, participants' statements, and classroom observations. Documentary evidence can strengthen qualitative inquiry by providing an additional source through which researchers can examine events, practices, and institutional contexts (Flick, 2018; Denzin et al., 2018).

6. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed through a systematic qualitative process involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis began during data collection and continued after the fieldwork had been completed. This approach enabled the researcher to identify relevant information, organize emerging patterns, and interpret relationships among the findings. Miles et al. (2018) emphasize that qualitative data analysis requires systematic movement between data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions.

First, data reduction was conducted by selecting, organizing, and focusing the collected information according to the research objectives. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were reviewed, and information unrelated to teachers' pedagogical competence was excluded. Second, the researcher conducted data display by organizing the reduced data into descriptive categories and thematic patterns. Displays were used to facilitate comparison among information obtained from observations, interviews, and documents. Third, the researcher conducted conclusion drawing and verification by identifying recurring patterns and interpreting the meaning of the data in relation to the research focus (Miles et al., 2018; Saldaña, 2016).

The analysis was organized around the major dimensions of pedagogical competence examined in the study: (1) instructional planning, (2) implementation of *Akidah Akhlak* learning, (3) classroom management, (4) adaptation to students' characteristics and needs, (5) use of learning methods and media, and (6) assessment of learning outcomes. This analytical structure enabled the researcher to examine pedagogical competence as an integrated instructional practice.

7. Data Trustworthiness

The credibility of the findings was established through source and method triangulation. Source triangulation involved comparing information obtained from the

school principal, the *Akidah Akhlak* teacher, and students. Method triangulation involved comparing information generated through observation, interviews, and documentation. The researcher compared teachers' statements with classroom observations and relevant documents to identify areas of convergence and discrepancy.

Triangulation was used to strengthen the credibility of the findings and reduce dependence on a single source of information. Qualitative research requires attention to credibility and consistency because interpretations are constructed from multiple forms of contextual evidence (Denzin et al., 2018; Flick, 2018). Through triangulation, the researcher was able to develop interpretations based on evidence obtained from different participants and data-collection procedures.

RESULTS

Based on observations, interviews, and documentary analysis conducted at MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat in June 2022, this section presents the findings concerning teachers' pedagogical competence in Grade IX Akidah Akhlak instruction. The findings indicate that teachers demonstrated a generally adequate level of pedagogical competence, as reflected in several observable aspects of instructional practice, including understanding students' characteristics, applying learning theories and instructional principles, developing and implementing the curriculum, communicating effectively and respectfully with students, and responding to students' learning needs.

To provide a systematic analysis of teachers' pedagogical competence, the findings are organized into nine core competencies that constitute the principal dimensions of pedagogical competence examined in this study. These competencies encompass teachers' understanding of students' characteristics; mastery of learning theories and instructional principles; curriculum development; implementation of educative learning; utilization of information and communication technology; effective, empathetic, and polite communication; assessment and evaluation of learning processes and outcomes; utilization of assessment results to improve learning; and reflective practice for improving instructional quality. The following subsections present each competency based on the triangulated evidence obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation.

1. Teachers' Understanding of Students' Characteristics

The findings indicate that teachers demonstrated a relatively comprehensive understanding of Grade IX students' characteristics across physical, moral, social, emotional, cultural, and intellectual dimensions. This understanding was reflected not only in teachers' awareness of students' individual differences but also in their efforts to adjust classroom interactions and learning support according to students' needs. Observation showed that teachers paid attention to students' participation, classroom behavior, learning responses, and interaction with peers. For example, students were observed helping classmates who lacked learning materials, indicating patterns of social interaction that teachers could identify during classroom activities (Observation, Students' Classroom Activities, June 28, 2022).

The teacher explained that students' characteristics were identified through several sources of information and classroom behaviors:

"Students have different characteristics. Their physical characteristics can be identified through student data, while their moral characteristics can be seen from their responsibility in completing assignments and their behavior toward teachers and peers. Social and emotional characteristics can be observed through their daily interaction and enthusiasm for learning. Their intellectual characteristics can be seen from their learning outcomes, creativity, participation, and responses during lessons." (P02, Male, Akidah Akhlak Teacher, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 27, 2022)

The interview data further suggest that teachers did not rely exclusively on academic achievement when identifying students' abilities. Classroom participation, willingness to ask questions, responses to learning tasks, and students' behavior were also considered. Students who experienced greater difficulty in understanding the material received closer attention and additional explanation. This practice was consistent with the observation that the teacher re-explained material and provided examples when students demonstrated difficulties in understanding the lesson.

From the students' perspective, this individualized attention was also evident in classroom interaction. One student stated:

"The teacher pays attention to us. When we do not understand, the teacher asks us questions, explains the material again, and gives examples." (P03, Female, Grade IX Student, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 29, 2022)

The principal's account supported these findings while also indicating that teachers' understanding of students was not necessarily complete in every dimension. He explained that teachers were able to recognize students' different characteristics through classroom interaction and learning activities, although some aspects of students' social and personal lives could not be fully observed within the school environment.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that teachers' understanding of students' characteristics was primarily developed through continuous classroom observation, interaction, learning performance, and attention to individual differences. The triangulation of observation and interviews indicates that this competence was implemented in practice, particularly through differentiated attention and additional explanation for students who experienced learning difficulties. However, the findings also show that teachers' knowledge of students remained largely situated within the school context, limiting their ability to fully understand characteristics and circumstances beyond the classroom.

2. Teachers' Mastery of Learning Theories and Instructional Principles

The findings show that teachers demonstrated mastery of learning theories and instructional principles through the use of varied teaching methods, active student engagement, continuous checking of understanding, and adaptation of instruction to students' learning needs. Classroom observation revealed that the teacher began lessons by explaining the learning activities and objectives, invited students to ask questions, and provided opportunities for students to process the material before proceeding to subsequent activities. The teacher also checked students' understanding and re-explained difficult material when necessary (Observation, Classroom Learning Activities, June 27, 2022).

Rather than relying solely on lecturing, the teacher employed discussion, question-and-answer activities, observation, demonstration, and learning media. Students were encouraged to participate in classroom activities and were sometimes positioned as learning resources or examples in explaining particular concepts. The teacher also used challenging questions to stimulate students' thinking while providing guidance when they encountered difficulties.

The teacher explained:

"I vary the teaching style, methods, strategies, and media so that the learning process is not monotonous. Students need to be active, so I give challenging questions and guide them in finding solutions." (P02, Male, Akidah Akhlak Teacher, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 27, 2022)

This approach was reinforced by the principal, who observed that teachers generally employed more than one instructional method and attempted to relate learning materials to students' immediate environment. According to the principal, classroom instruction involved discussion and question-and-answer activities rather than depending entirely on conventional lecture-based teaching (P01, Male, Principal, *MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat*, Interview, June 25, 2022).

Students' accounts similarly indicated that learning activities involved multiple methods and learning media. One student described the use of paper-based media, group discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and learning activities outside the classroom, particularly when discussing topics related to proper conduct toward parents and teachers:

"We use paper as learning media, discuss in groups, and have question-and-answer activities. Sometimes we also learn outside the classroom." (P04, Male, Grade IX Student, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 27, 2022)

The convergence of observation and interview data indicates that teachers' instructional competence was reflected in their ability to create interactive learning environments and adjust instructional strategies to students' responses. The teacher's practice of checking comprehension before moving to new material further suggests an effort to ensure that learning was not merely content delivery but involved students' actual understanding.

Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the implementation of instructional principles was primarily dependent on teachers' classroom strategies and the learning resources available at the school. Thus, while variation in methods and active participation were evident, the consistency and scope of their implementation could still be influenced by contextual conditions within the school.

Overall, teachers' mastery of learning theories and instructional principles was manifested through methodological variation, active participation, formative checking of understanding, guided problem solving, and adaptation of instruction to students' learning

responses. These practices indicate that pedagogical competence was not confined to lesson planning but was translated into concrete classroom interaction.

3. Teachers' Capacity to Develop the Curriculum

The findings indicate that teachers demonstrated the capacity to develop and operationalize the curriculum through lesson planning aligned with the school curriculum and syllabus. Before instruction, the teacher prepared a lesson plan (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran/RPP*) as a guide for organizing learning objectives, materials, activities, and assessment. Observation confirmed that classroom activities were generally conducted in accordance with the planned learning sequence (Observation, Classroom Learning Activities, June 27, 2022).

The teacher explained:

"Before teaching, I prepare the RPP according to the syllabus and the curriculum used by the school. The RPP becomes a guide for implementing the learning process." (P02, Male, Akidah Akhlak Teacher, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 27, 2022)

The principal confirmed that teachers prepared lesson plans based on the applicable curriculum and syllabus and used these plans to organize classroom instruction:

"The teachers prepare their RPP according to the syllabus and school curriculum and use them as a reference in conducting the learning process." (P01, Male, Principal, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 25, 2022)

Documentary evidence in the form of lesson-planning and curriculum materials further supported the interview findings, demonstrating that curriculum implementation was preceded by formal instructional planning (RPP and Curriculum Documents, Documentation Analysis, June 25, 2022).

Taken together, the findings suggest that teachers' curriculum competence was evident in their ability to translate curriculum requirements into classroom planning. However, curriculum development in this context appeared primarily as curriculum adaptation and operationalization through lesson planning, rather than extensive independent curriculum design. This distinction is important because teachers' pedagogical competence was demonstrated mainly through their ability to align planned instruction with the school curriculum and students' classroom needs.

4. Teachers' Implementation of Educative Learning

The findings show that teachers implemented educative learning by combining structured lesson planning with flexible classroom practices. Observation indicated that the teacher conducted learning activities according to the RPP, used learning media relevant to the material, encouraged students to ask questions, and provided additional explanations when students experienced difficulties (Observation, Classroom Learning Activities, June 28, 2022).

The teacher emphasized that the RPP functioned as a framework rather than a rigid script:

"Learning is a process of facilitating students. I follow the RPP, but I also develop and add material according to the children's needs. If students have difficulties, I explain the material again and approach them individually to find the cause of the difficulty." (P02, Male, Akidah Akhlak Teacher, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 27, 2022)

This finding indicates that the teacher attempted to balance curriculum requirements with responsiveness to students' learning conditions. The use of individual approaches, re-explanation, and problem-solving support suggests that educative learning was understood as a process of facilitating students rather than simply transmitting subject matter.

The principal similarly reported that teachers encouraged active participation, problem solving, and connections between learning materials and students' everyday lives:

"The teachers try to make students active, encourage them to solve problems, and relate the material to real-life situations. However, the available learning time is sometimes limited." (P01, Male, Principal, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 25, 2022)

The observation data corroborated the presence of student participation and teacher responsiveness during classroom activities. At the same time, limited instructional time emerged as a contextual constraint that affected the extent to which all planned learning activities could be implemented.

Thus, the implementation of educative learning can be characterized by structured planning, contextual adaptation, individualized assistance, active participation, and problem-solving opportunities, although its implementation was not always optimal because of time constraints.

5. Teachers' Use of Information and Communication Technology

The findings indicate that information and communication technology (ICT) was incorporated into Akidah Akhlak learning, particularly through mobile phones and WhatsApp communication. Observation showed that mobile phones were used to support access to learning materials, assignment submission, and communication between teachers and students. WhatsApp groups also facilitated learning communication during periods when instructional activities alternated between online and face-to-face modes (Observation, Learning Activities and Communication, June 28, 2022).

The teacher and other school participants indicated that digital technology had become an important supplementary resource for learning. The principal explained that most teachers used available technological devices to distribute materials and support online learning. However, the availability of school-based technological equipment remained a constraint because several LCD projectors were damaged (P01, Male, Principal, *MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat*, Interview, June 25, 2022).

A student also recalled the use of technology in Akidah Akhlak instruction:

"The teacher sometimes used the LCD to show videos and pictures about akhlakul karimah. When the material was not available in the textbook, the teacher used a mobile phone to find additional information." (P06, Male, Grade IX Student, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 29, 2022)

These findings demonstrate that ICT use was not limited to classroom presentation but also supported communication, access to supplementary materials, and assignment management. Nevertheless, technological integration remained partly dependent on available infrastructure. The damage to LCD projectors meant that teachers increasingly relied on personal or student-accessible mobile devices.

Overall, teachers demonstrated an adaptive use of ICT, particularly through mobile phones and WhatsApp. The practice shows teachers' ability to utilize accessible technologies to maintain learning communication and supplement instructional materials, while infrastructure limitations restricted the broader integration of digital learning resources.

6. Teachers' Effective, Empathetic, and Polite Communication

The findings demonstrate that teachers maintained effective, empathetic, and polite communication with students during Akidah Akhlak instruction. Classroom observation showed that the teacher used clear and concise language, responded to students' questions respectfully, and maintained a polite manner even when correcting inappropriate behavior. The teacher also adjusted explanations when students experienced difficulties in understanding the material (Observation, Classroom Communication, June 2022).

The teacher emphasized that communication was developed through continuous interaction, questioning, feedback, and appreciation of students' responses:

"I communicate with students through questions and answers and by checking which parts they find difficult. I try to speak politely because the teacher should be an example for students. When students answer correctly, I appreciate them, and when their answers are incorrect, I correct them politely." (P02, Male, Akidah Akhlak Teacher, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 27, 2022)

The principal corroborated this pattern, noting that teachers generally communicated with students politely, re-explained difficult material, and appreciated students' correct responses. Feedback was provided both orally and through students' written work, while material that had not been adequately understood was revisited in subsequent instruction (P01, Male, Principal, *MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat*, Interview, June 25, 2022).

The students' experiences also support the finding that teacher communication extended beyond simply delivering explanations. Students received opportunities to ask questions and obtain clarification when they encountered difficulties. Feedback was also connected to students' learning records and classroom assignments (P07, Male, Grade IX Student, *MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat*, Interview, June 2022).

The triangulated findings therefore indicate that teachers' communication competence was characterized by clarity, politeness, responsiveness, constructive correction, and appreciation. These practices contributed to an interactional learning environment in which students could seek clarification without being discouraged by incorrect responses.

7. Teachers' Assessment and Evaluation of Learning Processes and Outcomes

The findings indicate that teachers implemented assessment by considering students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Observation showed that knowledge was assessed through assignments and learning tasks, attitudes through observation of students' daily behavior, and skills through practical activities and projects (Observation, Assessment Activities, June 2022).

The teacher explained:

"For attitudes, I assess students through direct observation of their behavior. Knowledge is assessed through oral and written assignments, while skills are assessed through practice and projects. Assessment needs to be carried out continuously to see the students' development." (P02, Male, Akidah Akhlak Teacher, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 27, 2022)

This approach demonstrates that assessment was not restricted to written examinations. Behavioral observation and practical performance were also incorporated into the evaluation process, reflecting an attempt to assess students more holistically.

The principal confirmed that teachers observed students' behavior both inside and outside the classroom and also considered students' work and progress through portfolio-based assessment:

"Teachers observe students' behavior in class and outside the classroom, including how they interact with their peers. Their work and progress can also be seen through portfolios." (P01, Male, Principal, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 25, 2022)

The documentary evidence, including students' assignments, assessment records, and portfolios, further supported the existence of multiple forms of assessment (Assessment Records and Student Portfolios, Documentation Analysis, June 2022).

Overall, the findings reveal that assessment and evaluation were conducted through knowledge-based, behavioral, and performance-oriented measures. The convergence of observation, interviews, and documentation suggests that teachers had implemented assessment as an integral component of learning rather than as an activity conducted only at the end of instruction.

8. Utilizing Assessment and Evaluation Results to Improve Learning

The findings show that assessment results were used primarily to identify students who had not yet achieved the expected level of understanding and to provide remedial

instruction. Observation indicated that teachers reviewed students' learning results and used the information to determine whether additional assistance was required (Observation, Follow-up Learning Activities, June 2022).

The teacher explained:

"Students who have not reached the required standard receive remedial activities. The questions may be different in wording or context, but the material remains the same so that students can improve their understanding." (P02, Male, Akidah Akhlak Teacher, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 27, 2022)

The principal confirmed that assessment results were considered when determining subsequent instructional responses. Remedial learning was provided to students who had not achieved the required standard, while students who demonstrated stronger performance could receive additional development or be recommended for further coaching (P01, Male, Principal, *MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat*, Interview, June 25, 2022).

From the students' perspective, remedial activities were experienced as a recurring form of follow-up after assessment:

"We often receive remedial questions when our scores are not sufficient. The questions are different, but the material is similar." (P09, Male, Grade IX Student, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 29, 2022)

The findings therefore indicate that assessment results were actively used for diagnostic and remedial purposes. However, the utilization of results for enrichment was less consistent. While academically strong students could receive additional coaching, systematic enrichment activities were not implemented as consistently as remedial activities. This asymmetry suggests that teachers' use of assessment data was more strongly oriented toward addressing learning deficiencies than extending the learning of high-achieving students.

9. Reflective Practice for Improving Instructional Quality

The findings indicate that reflective practice represented the least consistently implemented dimension of teachers' pedagogical competence. Classroom observation showed that when beginning new material, the teacher briefly referred to previously learned content but did not conduct a comprehensive review of the preceding learning process (Observation, Classroom Learning Activities, June 27, 2022).

The teacher explained that reflective activities had previously been conducted more regularly but became less consistent during the period affected by the COVID-19 pandemic:

"Before COVID-19, I often reflected on the learning process. After that, reflection was no longer conducted regularly because the learning time was limited. Students were asked to review the previous material independently, and I only briefly connected it with the new material." (P02, Male, Akidah Akhlak Teacher, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 27, 2022)

The principal similarly emphasized the importance of reflection while acknowledging the practical constraints affecting its implementation. According to him, teachers ideally should review the learning process and identify aspects that need to be maintained or improved. However, limited instructional time created pressure to complete the required Grade IX material (P01, Male, Principal, *MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat*, Interview, June 25, 2022).

A student's account was consistent with this observation:

"The teacher does not usually review all the previous material. Before a test or new lesson, we sometimes study the material ourselves or discuss it with friends." (P10, Male, Grade IX Student, MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat, Interview, June 29, 2022)

The findings suggest that reflective practice existed mainly in the form of brief references to previous material and informal adjustments during instruction rather than as a systematic process of reviewing teaching outcomes. Documentary evidence also indicates limited systematic documentation of reflective activities in the available learning records (Learning Planning and Reflection Documents, Documentation Analysis, June 25, 2022).

Taken together, the evidence indicates that teachers recognized the importance of reflection but faced contextual constraints that reduced its regularity. Thus, reflective practice remained less systematic than other dimensions of pedagogical competence, particularly because instructional time was prioritized toward completing Grade IX learning materials.

The findings across the nine dimensions were synthesized to illustrate the overall pattern of teachers' pedagogical competence in Grade IX Akidah Akhlak instruction. Figure 1 summarizes the interconnected competencies, their implementation patterns, and the contextual factors influencing their application.

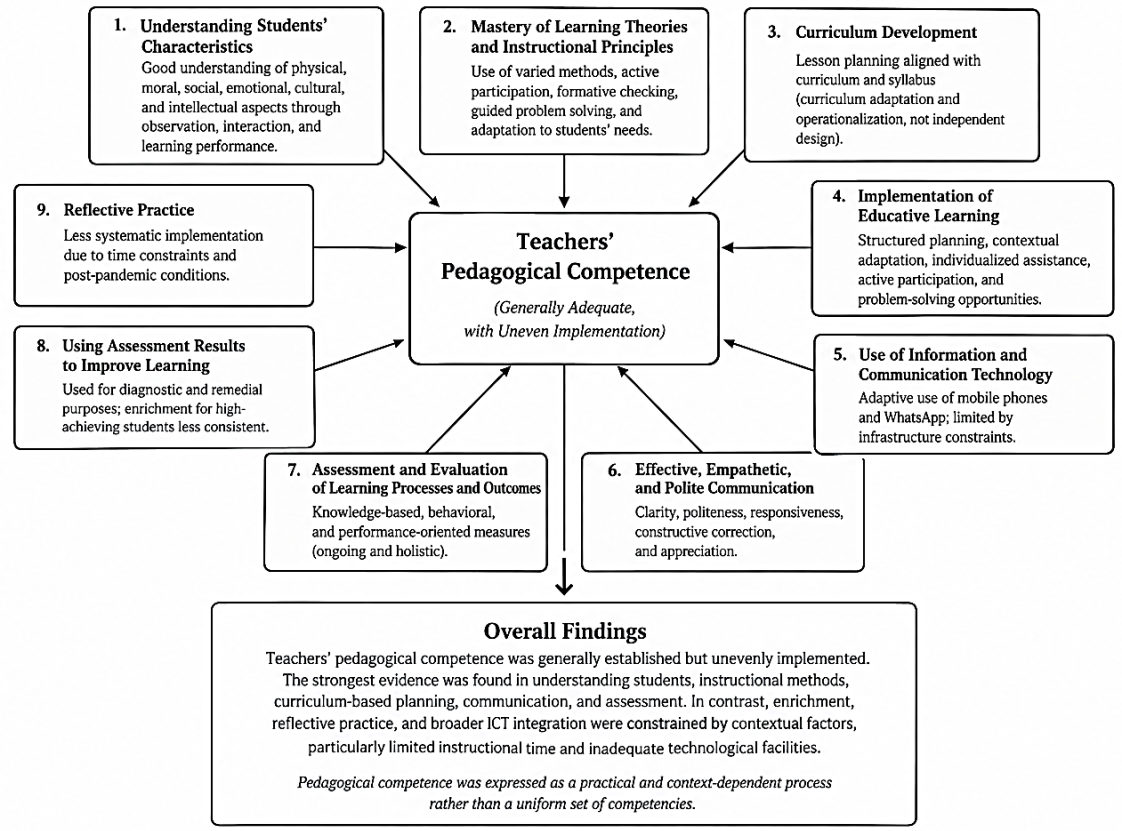


Figure 1. Synthesis of Teachers' Pedagogical Competence in Grade IX Akidah Akhlak Instruction

Source: *Author's analysis of interview, observation, and documentary data, 2022.*

Figure 1 illustrates that teachers' pedagogical competence was generally adequate but unevenly implemented across the nine dimensions. The findings show relatively strong implementation in understanding students' characteristics, varying instructional methods, curriculum-based planning, educative learning, effective communication, and multidimensional assessment. Meanwhile, the use of assessment results for enrichment, systematic reflective practice, and broader ICT integration remained less consistent, primarily due to limited instructional time and technological infrastructure. Overall, the figure indicates that teachers' pedagogical competence was expressed as a practical and context-dependent process, shaped by students' needs, curriculum requirements, available resources, and everyday classroom conditions.

DISCUSSION

1. Results Analysis

This study aimed to analyze how teachers' pedagogical competence is enacted in Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* instruction at MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat. The findings indicate that pedagogical competence was not manifested as a single or isolated teaching skill but as an interconnected instructional process involving teachers' understanding of students, application of learning principles, curriculum operationalization, educative learning, ICT utilization, interpersonal communication, assessment, use of assessment results, and reflective practice. The evidence suggests that teachers were able to translate pedagogical knowledge into observable classroom practices, although the consistency of such practices varied across competency dimensions.

The first important finding concerns teachers' understanding of students' characteristics. Teachers identified differences in students through classroom interaction, participation, behavior, learning performance, and responses to instructional tasks. More importantly, this knowledge was translated into differentiated attention, repeated explanations, and individual assistance. The significance of this finding lies in the movement from knowing students to responding to students. In other words, students' characteristics became pedagogically meaningful when teachers used information about learners to modify their instructional responses. The pedagogical competence is the ability to understand learners and facilitate their potential development rather than merely possessing knowledge about student characteristics (Haenilah, 2017; Nurmiati, (2021).

The second finding demonstrates that teachers' mastery of learning theories and instructional principles was expressed through methodological variation, questioning, discussion, guided problem solving, and continuous checking of students' understanding. The use of multiple instructional approaches suggests that teachers recognized that effective learning cannot depend exclusively on one-way transmission of religious content. Instead, students were positioned as participants who needed opportunities to ask questions, respond to problems, discuss ideas, and connect learning materials with their experiences.

The findings on curriculum development further reveal that teachers' curriculum competence operated primarily through curriculum operationalization rather than autonomous curriculum design. Teachers translated the syllabus and school curriculum into

RPP-based instructional plans and subsequently used these plans as a framework for classroom implementation. This distinction is analytically important. Preparing an RPP demonstrates teachers' capacity to organize curriculum requirements, but pedagogical competence becomes more visible when planned objectives, materials, activities, and assessment are adapted to actual classroom conditions. Thus, curriculum competence in this setting should be understood as a process of translating formal curriculum expectations into contextually workable learning practices, rather than simply producing administrative teaching documents (Hidayatullah et al., 2018; Fahmi et al., 2022).

A related pattern emerged in the implementation of educative learning. Teachers generally followed planned instructional sequences but retained flexibility to provide additional explanations, approach students individually, and adjust learning activities when difficulties emerged. This suggests that the RPP functioned as a pedagogical framework rather than a rigid instructional script. Such flexibility is particularly relevant to *Akidah Akhlak*, in which learning objectives extend beyond cognitive acquisition toward moral understanding, attitudes, and social behavior (Rahman, 2018; Siswati et al., 2020). Consequently, the pedagogical value of instruction lies not only in whether teachers complete planned material but also in whether they can transform religious content into meaningful learning experiences that respond to students' developmental and contextual needs.

ICT utilization provides another dimension of this adaptive competence. Teachers used mobile phones, WhatsApp, LCD-based materials, videos, and supplementary digital information to support communication and learning. However, technology integration remained constrained by infrastructure, particularly damaged LCD projectors. The finding therefore suggests that ICT competence in this context was characterized less by sophisticated technological integration than by adaptive utilization of accessible resources. The finding also indicates that technological competence should be interpreted in relation to institutional conditions, because teachers' pedagogical choices are partly shaped by the resources available to them.

The sixth finding, concerning teachers' communication, provides an important connecting mechanism among the other competencies. Clear explanations, polite correction, appreciation, questioning, and responsiveness created opportunities for students to express difficulties and seek clarification. Communication therefore functioned

not merely as a means of delivering instructional content but as a mechanism through which teachers identified students' needs, implemented instructional adaptation, encouraged participation, and provided feedback. This indicates that interpersonal competence is embedded within pedagogical competence and helps connect teachers' understanding of learners with their instructional decisions.

Assessment constituted another central component of the instructional cycle. Teachers assessed students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills through assignments, observation, practical activities, projects, and portfolios. The multidimensional nature of assessment is particularly significant for *Akidah Akhlak* because the subject encompasses religious knowledge as well as moral and behavioral development. Assessment, therefore, was not limited to determining whether students could recall concepts; it also provided information about how learning was reflected in behavior and performance. This supports the view that pedagogical competence includes the capacity to assess both learning processes and outcomes and to use assessment as part of the broader learning process (Nurmiati, 2021).

However, the use of assessment results reveals an important asymmetry in the teachers' pedagogical practice. Assessment information was used relatively clearly for identifying students who had not achieved the expected standard and for providing remedial activities, whereas systematic enrichment for higher-achieving students was less consistent. This suggests that assessment was functioning more strongly as a corrective mechanism than as a differentiated learning mechanism. The finding is important because it demonstrates that having an assessment system does not automatically mean that assessment data are fully utilized for instructional improvement. The pedagogical value of assessment depends on how systematically teachers transform evidence of learning into subsequent instructional decisions.

Reflective practice represents the clearest area of uneven implementation. Although teachers recognized the importance of reviewing previous learning and making instructional adjustments, systematic reflection was less frequent than other pedagogical activities. Limited instructional time, particularly in the context of post-pandemic learning conditions, encouraged teachers to prioritize completion of Grade IX material over systematic reflection. This finding suggests that reflective competence is strongly dependent on the organizational and temporal conditions surrounding teaching. It also

indicates that pedagogical competence should not be interpreted solely as an individual teacher characteristic; its enactment is influenced by institutional constraints and the practical demands of classroom instruction.

Taken together, these findings directly address the objective of examining how teachers' pedagogical competence is enacted in Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* instruction. The evidence shows that competence was manifested through an interconnected sequence: understanding students, planning and operationalizing the curriculum, selecting instructional strategies and resources, implementing and adapting learning, communicating with students, assessing learning, responding to assessment evidence, and reflecting on instructional practice. This sequence demonstrates that pedagogical competence operates as a dynamic instructional cycle rather than as a collection of independent competencies.

The findings also clarify the distinction between formal competence and enacted competence. Teachers possessed formal planning mechanisms, curriculum references, assessment procedures, and access to instructional resources; however, the extent to which these elements became effective pedagogical practices depended on teachers' ability to adapt them to students and classroom circumstances.

The nine competency dimensions are therefore mutually reinforcing. Teachers' understanding of students provides the basis for instructional adaptation; learning theories and instructional principles inform the selection of methods; curriculum planning provides structural direction; communication facilitates interaction and feedback; ICT and other learning media expand instructional resources; assessment provides evidence of learning; assessment results inform remedial responses; and reflection provides the potential mechanism for improving subsequent instruction. Weakness in one component can consequently affect the functioning of other components.

For example, teachers' ability to recognize students' learning difficulties was meaningful because it was followed by additional explanation and remedial activities. Similarly, assessment became pedagogically consequential because its results were connected to subsequent instructional responses. Conversely, limited reflection weakened the feedback loop that could have connected assessment and classroom experience to systematic improvement of future instruction. The findings thus suggest that the quality of pedagogical competence depends not only on the presence of individual competencies but also on the degree of integration among them.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support the conceptualization of pedagogical competence as an integrated capacity to understand learners, design and implement instruction, manage learning, assess outcomes, and facilitate students' development (Haenilah, 2017; Nurmiati, 2021). The evidence further extends this conception by showing that, in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction, pedagogical competence acquires a distinctive character because teachers must connect instructional processes with religious understanding, moral development, and students' social behavior. This corresponds with the view that *Akidah Akhlak* education should move beyond the transmission of theological content toward the development of students' attitudes and social conduct (Rahman, 2018; Siswati et al., 2020).

The findings also support the proposition that pedagogical competence involves contextual judgment. Teachers did not implement instructional plans mechanically; instead, they adjusted explanations, methods, media, and forms of assistance according to students' responses and available resources. Such practices are consistent with the understanding that effective pedagogical competence requires the application of educational approaches and strategies in ways that correspond to learners and learning conditions (Supinah, 2016; Amanah et al., (2020).

The overall synthesis can therefore be conceptualized as an enacted pedagogical cycle in which teachers' competence moves from *understanding* to *planning*, from *planning* to *instructional action*, from *action* to *assessment*, and from *assessment* to *instructional response*. The cycle is supported by communication, learning resources, and contextual adaptation, while its continuity is influenced by institutional conditions such as instructional time and technological infrastructure.

This synthesis provides a more integrated interpretation of pedagogical competence in *Akidah Akhlak* learning. Rather than viewing competence as a checklist of professional abilities, the findings indicate that its substantive meaning emerges from how these abilities operate together in real classroom practice. Teachers at MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat demonstrated this integration most clearly in understanding students, varying instructional strategies, adapting learning, communicating with students, and conducting assessment. At the same time, the weaker systematic use of enrichment and reflective practice indicates that the instructional cycle was functional but not fully continuous. Thus, the central finding is that teachers' pedagogical competence was substantially enacted in everyday

Akidah Akhlak instruction, but its implementation remained shaped by the interaction between teachers' pedagogical decisions and contextual constraints.

2. Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study are generally consistent with previous research indicating that teachers' pedagogical competence is an important component of effective Islamic education. However, the present study extends this literature by examining pedagogical competence as an integrated and observable instructional process within Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* learning. Previous studies have commonly emphasized teachers' abilities to understand students, plan instruction, implement appropriate learning strategies, and conduct assessment (Hakim, 2017; Nurfuadi, 2020). The present findings similarly demonstrate these competencies but further show how they operate sequentially and interactively in actual classroom practice.

The finding concerning teachers' understanding of students' characteristics is consistent with Hakim, (2017), who reported that teachers' pedagogical competence was reflected in their ability to recognize student diversity and respond to differences in the learning process. Similarly, Nurmiati, (2021) emphasized that understanding students' characteristics constitutes a central element of pedagogical competence because teachers need to adjust learning according to students' developmental and learning needs. The present study supports these findings by demonstrating that teachers identified students' differences through participation, behavior, learning responses, and achievement and subsequently provided additional explanations and individualized assistance. Thus, the present evidence suggests that understanding students becomes pedagogically meaningful when it is translated into concrete instructional adaptation.

The findings regarding the use of varied teaching methods and active student participation also correspond with previous research. Hakim, (2017) found that pedagogically competent teachers were able to implement active learning and employ instructional strategies responsive to student diversity. Likewise, Rasmuin and Islamiyah, (2020) emphasized the importance of selecting instructional models according to students' characteristics and the nature of *Akidah Akhlak* material. The present study confirms this pattern through the use of discussion, question-and-answer activities, observation, demonstration, and problem-solving tasks. Nevertheless, the current findings add that methodological variation was not merely a strategy for increasing classroom activity; it

functioned as a mechanism for responding to differences in students' understanding and maintaining interaction during religious learning.

The findings on curriculum planning are also comparable with Fahmi et al., (2022), who found that teachers' pedagogical competence was reflected in the preparation and development of curriculum-related instructional documents, including syllabi, lesson plans, and assessment instruments. The present study similarly found that teachers prepared RPPs based on the school curriculum and syllabus. However, an important distinction emerged. In this setting, curriculum competence appeared primarily as curriculum operationalization and adaptation, rather than extensive independent curriculum development. This finding indicates that formal instructional planning should not be equated automatically with curriculum innovation; its pedagogical significance depends on how effectively planned objectives and activities are translated into classroom practices.

The implementation of educative learning in the present study is consistent with the findings of Amanah et al., (2020), who emphasized teachers' capacity to plan and implement effective learning, manage instructional processes, and promote student engagement. It also corresponds with Rahman, (2018), who highlighted the importance of engaging and responsive learning in *Akidah Akhlak* education. The present findings extend these perspectives by showing that teachers used the RPP flexibly, re-explained difficult material, approached students individually, and connected learning with students' everyday experiences. This suggests that educative learning is not simply determined by whether teachers follow a lesson plan but by their capacity to adapt planned instruction to actual classroom conditions.

ICT utilization presents a similar pattern of continuity and contextual difference. Rijal and Tadris, (2020) found that pedagogical competence among PAI teachers was reflected in the planning, implementation, and assessment of learning involving instructional media, while ICT mastery, facilities, technical problems, and time represented important challenges. The present study confirms these constraints in the *Akidah Akhlak* context. Teachers used mobile phones, WhatsApp, videos, and LCD-supported materials, but damaged technological facilities limited broader implementation. This finding is also consistent with Asad et al., (2021), who argued that contemporary teacher competence requires the integration of technological knowledge with appropriate pedagogical strategies. The present study therefore indicates that ICT competence should be understood not only

in terms of teachers' technological skills but also in relation to the accessibility and reliability of institutional resources.

The findings concerning assessment are broadly consistent with Nurmiati, (2021), who identified assessment of learning processes and outcomes as an essential component of pedagogical competence. They also correspond with Fahmi et al., (2022), who identified assessment as part of teachers' pedagogical responsibilities in curriculum implementation. The present study, however, provides a more differentiated finding: teachers assessed students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills through assignments, behavioral observation, practical activities, projects, and portfolios, but assessment results were used more systematically for remedial learning than for enrichment. This suggests that the existence of multidimensional assessment does not necessarily indicate equally systematic utilization of assessment data for all categories of learners.

One of the clearest contributions of the present study concerns reflective practice. Previous research has generally highlighted planning, implementation, assessment, and student development as important indicators of pedagogical competence (Hakim, 2017; Nurfuadi, 2020). In contrast, the present findings indicate that systematic reflection was the least consistently implemented dimension. Teachers recognized the value of reviewing previous learning but were constrained by limited instructional time and the need to complete Grade IX material. This difference suggests that reflective practice may be more vulnerable to contextual pressures than other pedagogical activities because it requires additional time for reviewing instructional outcomes and planning subsequent improvements.

The comparison with previous studies demonstrates substantial continuity while also revealing several contextual and process-oriented distinctions. Previous research has established the importance of student understanding, instructional planning, methodological variation, media utilization, assessment, and teacher development (Hakim, 2017; Rijal & Tadris, 2020; Sari and Samiha, 2020; Fahmi et al., 2022). The present study contributes to this literature by integrating these dimensions within a single analysis of Grade IX *Akidah Akhlak* instruction. More specifically, the findings show that pedagogical competence is enacted through a dynamic relationship between understanding students, planning instruction, adapting classroom practices, communicating with learners, assessing learning, responding to assessment evidence, and reflecting on practice. At the same time,

the uneven implementation of enrichment and reflection demonstrates that pedagogical competence is shaped not only by teachers' professional capacities but also by contextual conditions such as instructional time and technological resources. This process-oriented perspective provides a more nuanced explanation of how pedagogical competence functions in the everyday practice of *Akidah Akhlak* education.

3. Implications of Findings

The findings contribute to the understanding of pedagogical competence by demonstrating that teachers' competence in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction operates as an interconnected instructional process rather than as a set of isolated competencies. Theoretically, the study extends existing perspectives on pedagogical competence by showing how understanding students, curriculum operationalization, instructional adaptation, communication, assessment, and reflection are mutually related within classroom practice. This supports the view that effective teaching competence involves not only technical knowledge but also the capacity to adapt instruction to learners and contextual conditions (Haenilah, 2017; Jentsch et al., 2022).

Practically, the findings suggest that teacher development should prioritize the integration of instructional planning, differentiated teaching, ICT use, assessment-based improvement, and systematic reflection. For *Akidah Akhlak* teachers, pedagogical competence is particularly important because learning involves not only knowledge acquisition but also the development of attitudes and moral behavior (Rahman, 2018; Siswati et al., 2020). Schools can therefore strengthen professional development through collaborative reflection, peer support, improved access to instructional technology, and strategies for using assessment results beyond remediation. These measures may help transform existing functional competence into a more continuous and reflective instructional cycle.

4. Research Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted in a single MTs and involved a relatively limited group of participants, which restricts the transferability of the findings to other Islamic junior secondary schools. Second, the qualitative design relied on observations, interviews, and documentation, making the findings potentially subject to researcher interpretation and participant self-reporting. Although source and method triangulation were employed, some aspects of pedagogical

practice, particularly teachers' reflection and students' experiences outside the classroom, could not be observed comprehensively. Third, the study captured instructional practices within a specific period and contextual setting; therefore, changes in teacher competence over longer periods were not examined. Future research could address these limitations through multi-site studies, longitudinal designs, and the integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

CONCLUSION

This study examined teachers' pedagogical competence in *Akidah Akhlak* instruction for Grade IX students at MTs Ibadurrahman Aik Ampat. The findings demonstrate that pedagogical competence is enacted as an interconnected instructional process involving understanding students' characteristics, applying learning theories, operationalizing the curriculum, conducting educative and adaptive learning, using ICT, communicating effectively, assessing learning, responding to assessment results, and reflecting on instructional practice. Rather than functioning as isolated competencies, these dimensions form a practical cycle in which teachers' understanding of students informs instructional planning and adaptation, while communication and assessment provide feedback for improving subsequent learning. However, the process remains uneven, particularly in the systematic use of reflection and the utilization of assessment results beyond remedial purposes.

The study contributes to existing knowledge by positioning pedagogical competence in *Akidah Akhlak* education as a context-sensitive and adaptive process that connects instructional knowledge with students' academic, social, emotional, and moral development. This perspective highlights that effective *Akidah Akhlak* teaching requires more than mastery of content or instructional techniques; it requires continuous adjustment between pedagogical decisions, learner needs, classroom realities, and the formative aims of religious education. In practical terms, schools and teachers should strengthen professional development through differentiated instruction, reflective practice, effective use of assessment evidence, collaborative teacher learning, and context-appropriate ICT integration.

The findings should nevertheless be interpreted within the contextual boundaries of a qualitative study conducted in a single MTs with a limited participant group and within

a specific period. Although triangulation strengthened the credibility of the findings, teacher and student accounts and researcher interpretation may still have influenced the representation of classroom practices. Future research should therefore examine pedagogical competence across multiple Islamic junior secondary schools and different regional contexts, preferably through longitudinal or mixed-method designs. Such studies could further investigate how pedagogical competence develops over time and how systematic reflection, assessment-informed instruction, and technology integration influence the quality of *Akidah Akhlak* learning and students' academic and moral development.

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