Review Article

Strategic Approach of Public Elementary School Principals in Improving the Pedagogical Competence of Islamic Religious Education Teachers

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Abstract. This research explores the pedagogical capabilities of Islamic Education teachers and the strategic efforts undertaken by elementary school principals to enhance these competencies, alongside the challenges encountered and the solutions adopted. The objective is to identify key issues, remedial actions, and strategic initiatives applied by principals in public elementary schools to foster pedagogical improvement among their teaching staff. Utilizing a qualitative method grounded in a phenomenological approach, this study involves principals and Islamic Education teachers as its primary informants. The findings reveal: first, teachers demonstrate proficiency in curriculum content, foundational learning theories, instructional delivery, and possess communicative, empathetic, and respectful traits, along with the ability to assess and follow up on student progress. Second, professional development is facilitated through workshops, academic supervision, mentoring, further education, and participation in training programs. Third, major challenges include limited access to teacher training, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, and a lack of teacher commitment. To address these, schools implement measures such as activating subject teacher forums (MGMP), promoting continuous learning, organizing workshops, conducting regular monitoring, and holding internal school meetings. The study highlights the importance of principals executing their core leadership functions effectively and underscores the collaborative role of teachers in fulfilling educational responsibilities.

Keywords: Pedagogical competence, Islamic Religious Education Teacher, Principal Leadership, Teacher Professional Development.

1. Introduction

The education system is required to produce graduates who are able to compete nationally and internationally [1]. Ideal graduates are intelligent, creative, and innovative individuals who possess a religious foundation in solving various problems [2]. This is where the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers becomes crucial in shaping a generation that is not only religious but also possesses strong character, noble morals, and is ready to face the challenges of the times [3] The Qur'an, Surah Al-Jumu'ah, verse 2, explains the importance of educators in the character-building process, which is reinforced by the opinion of Latifah [4] that student success is highly dependent on teacher quality. Therefore, the competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers is a key factor in supporting successful learning, especially in the current digital era [5].

Facing the digital era, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are required to possess adequate qualifications and competencies [6]. He et al. [7] stated that professional teacher competencies encompass pedagogical skills, student mentoring, curriculum development, and student service. The professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers is a combination of piety, scientific insight, technological mastery, and social and spiritual skills. This aligns with Kawuryan et al. [8] opinion, which states that teachers are a key element in the education system, while improving the quality of education is highly dependent on teacher performance [9].

Professional teachers generally must master four competency aspects: pedagogical, personality, professional, and social competencies [10]. These

competencies are abilities that teachers must possess and implement to fulfill their professional responsibilities [11]. A competent teacher is able to effectively shape the character of students [12].

In this context, pedagogical competence is crucial for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to interact effectively with students and help resolve learning challenges [13]. This competence encompasses understanding student characteristics, planning and implementing learning, evaluating learning outcomes, and developing student potential [14]. Factors such as teacher creativity, dedication, and commitment also influence student learning outcomes [15]. Therefore, mastery of pedagogical competence by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers is essential for effective learning in the modern era.

The challenges facing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers today include not only changes in information and communication technology but also shifts in social values in society [16]. Teachers are required to be digitally literate, keep abreast of developments in science and technology, develop innovative learning methods, and maintain moral and social values [17]. However, many teachers still have limited technological expertise, minimal use of digital learning applications, and limited training [18]. This suggests a relationship between teachers' digital literacy levels and their readiness to teach [19]. Therefore, the role of school principals as educational leaders is crucial in addressing this situation [20].

Principals play a crucial role in guiding and motivating teachers to achieve educational goals [21]. They have a strategic responsibility in improving teacher quality [22]. Previous research has shown that a principal's leadership style positively contributes to improving the pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers [23]. Therefore, principals are required to carry out the functions of coaching and evaluating teacher performance, including aspects of pedagogical competence.

Based on initial observations at several public elementary schools in Marioriwawo District, Soppeng Regency, it was found that although Islamic Religious Education teachers are capable of developing syllabi and lesson plans, they still experience difficulties in designing digital technology-based learning content. The use of conventional references, the lack of inspiring interactions in learning, and the limited use of learning evaluation tools remain challenges. Furthermore, principals have not been optimal in providing technical assistance due to their low digital literacy, high administrative burdens, and limited school operational funds. As a result, Islamic Religious Education teachers often fail to implement lesson plans effectively even though teaching materials are available.

The issue of the principal's role and teacher competence is not new, but it is rarely discussed in depth. Previous studies have focused more on general principal leadership [24], the professional competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers [25], or improving teacher pedagogical competence at the secondary level [26]. Some studies have also focused on academic supervision as a means of improving teacher competence [27]. In contrast, this study focuses on the creativity and innovation of principals in formulating strategies to improve the pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in elementary schools. As the primary mandate holders of the quality of Islamic religious education, principals need to develop relevant strategies to achieve the school's vision and mission. This research is expected to uncover the commitment and concrete strategies of principals in fostering the pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in public elementary schools, as the initial formal educational institutions that teach Islamic values to students.

2. Method

This study adopted a qualitative approach that relies on verbal data as the primary source of information, with the researcher acting as the central instrument in the data collection and analysis process. A phenomenological approach was used to understand how informants interpret and experience events within the context of their lives. The subjects of this study included 58 Public Elementary Schools (SDN) located in the Marioriwawo District, Soppeng Regency. Primary data were obtained from purposively selected informants, consisting of school principals and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers directly involved in the educational process at the schools. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained through official documentation from the principals and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, as well as literature references relevant to the research topic. Data collection techniques included direct field observation, in-depth interviews with informants, and the collection of supporting documents. Data analysis was conducted in three stages: data reduction (sorting and simplifying information), data presentation (data display), and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data validity was tested using four validity criteria: credibility (trustworthiness of the data), transferability (ability to be applied in other contexts), dependability (data consistency), and confirmability (data objectivity).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Pedagogical Competence of Islamic Education Teachers at SDN Marioriwawo District

The pedagogical competence of elementary school teachers encompasses mastery of various important aspects in supporting the teaching and learning process. This encompasses an understanding of student character, including physical, moral, social, cultural, emotional, and intellectual aspects. Furthermore, teachers are expected to master educational theories and principles, design curricula appropriate to their field, and be able to implement effective and meaningful learning processes. The use of information and communication technology in learning activities is also an important indicator of pedagogical competence. Islamic Religious Education teachers are required to facilitate the optimal development of students' potential, establish empathetic and polite communication, and conduct comprehensive evaluations of the learning process and outcomes. These evaluation results are then used to continuously improve and enhance the quality of learning. Reflective steps are also needed for teachers to continuously develop themselves and improve the quality of teaching [28].

In general, based on these indicators, the pedagogical competence of Islamic Education teachers at SDN Marioriwawo District will be further described through data presented in visual form in the next section. Based on the analysis of Figure 1, it is known that, in general, the pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at Public Elementary Schools (SDN) in Marioriwawo District has been managed quite well. Indicators are evident in teachers' skills in developing learning tools such as Lesson Plans (RPP), syllabi, annual programs, and semester programs, as well as in the effective implementation and evaluation of learning [29]. Furthermore, teachers also demonstrate the ability to utilize learning evaluation results as a basis for designing follow-up actions in the form of remedial programs for students who have not achieved mastery, and enrichment programs for students who have met standards. This approach is in accordance with the provisions of the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 57 of 2012, Article 5 Paragraph 2, which states that teachers are required to recognize student potential and characteristics, understand the theories and principles of effective learning, master the planning and implementation of learning, and manage

relevant assessment systems [30]. Furthermore, Figure 1 also identifies seven main indicators in the pedagogical competence of Islamic Education teachers at SDN Marioriwawo District, which are described as follows:
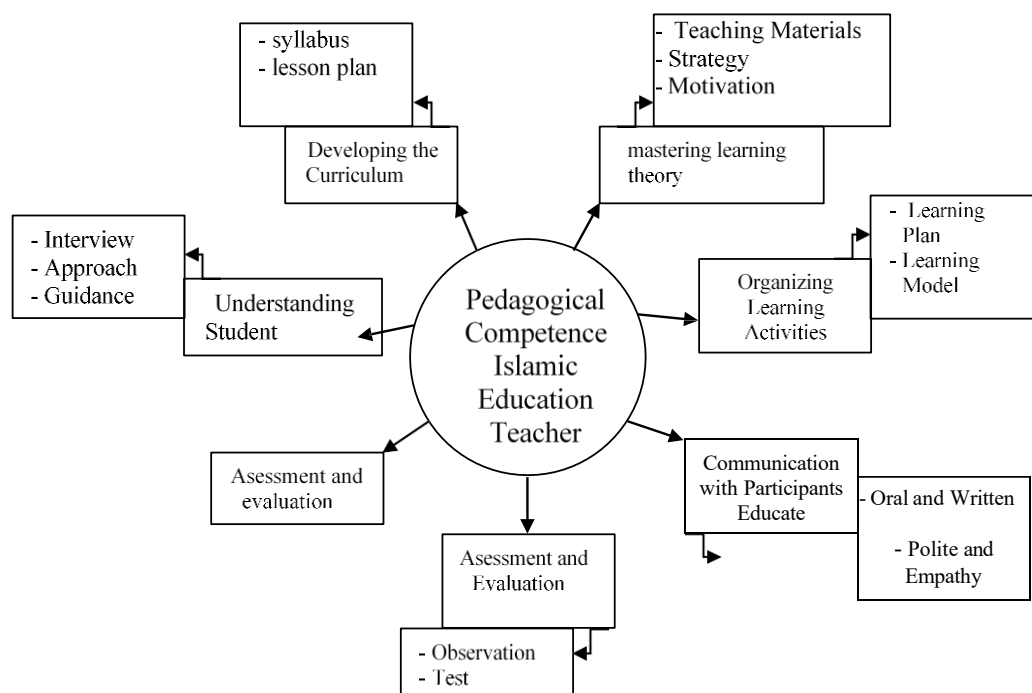

Figure 1. Competence Pedagogy Teacher PAI in General General

3.1.1 Mastery of Student Characteristics

Based on observations, it was found that Islamic Religious Education teachers at SDN Marioriwawo District understood students' emotional and moral characteristics. In practice, teachers actively responded to student behavior in class, for example, by calling out students who lacked focus and asking questions to refocus their attention on the subject matter. According to Hariyanto et al. [31], understanding student characteristics includes recognizing their personality, intelligence, and critical thinking skills. When dealing with students experiencing learning difficulties, teachers provide guidance and are open to consultations through various media, including digital platforms like WhatsApp. Suhirman et al. [32] added that the initial step in understanding student characteristics is through direct observation. Furthermore, teachers communicate with guidance and counseling (BK) teachers and homeroom teachers to obtain additional information regarding student behavior. If students experience difficulties understanding the material, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers provide assistance both during lessons and outside of class time, such as during breaks. Kerimbayev et al. [33] emphasized that learning evaluation is used as a means to identify student characteristics. Teachers ask questions that can identify students' strengths and weaknesses in understanding the material, and hold special meetings to focus on material deemed difficult.

Based on various informant opinions, it can be concluded that Islamic Religious Education teachers in Marioriwawo District are skilled at recognizing student characteristics, particularly in moral, social, emotional, and intellectual aspects. Teachers not only observe students' activeness and intelligence but also understand their personality and negative behaviors. Furthermore, teachers adapt their learning approaches to student characteristics and provide additional guidance to help them overcome learning difficulties. Personalized approaches, such as consultations via WhatsApp and discussions outside of class hours, serve as supporting strategies to ensure students' understanding of the material.

3.1.2 Developing the Curriculum

Based on observations, Islamic Religious Education teachers at SDN Marioriwawo District have demonstrated the application of curriculum development principles in accordance with a student-centered approach. In the learning process, students are encouraged to be actively involved, while learning objectives are formulated based on Core Competency Standards and Core Competencies (SK-KD) tailored to students' potential and needs. The selection of teaching materials is carried out by considering the achievement of learning objectives and the actual conditions of students, and is systematically compiled and delivered according to the curriculum flow.

As stated by an informant from the SPF UPTD of SDN 150 Lausa, the Islamic Religious Education curriculum was developed to address the demands of the times and the needs of students, with an emphasis on active student participation in the learning process. The syllabus and Lesson Implementation Plan (RPP) were developed by considering student abilities and characteristics [34].

Similarly, a teacher from the UPTD SPF SDN 151 Bunne stated that in designing the curriculum, not only the teacher's delivery of material is considered, but also student participation through questions and reflection, which encourages a deeper understanding of the material taught [35]. An informant from the UPTD SPF SDN 235 Goarie added that the syllabus and lesson plans are systematically prepared in accordance with curriculum guidelines, and teaching materials are selected based on their suitability to the students' conditions [36]. Overall, the data shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers in Marioriwawo District have good capabilities in curriculum development. They are able to develop learning plans that are oriented towards student needs, follow curriculum guidelines, and apply adaptive and contextual learning approaches.

3.1.3 Mastering Learning Theory and Learning Principles

In terms of mastery of learning theories and principles, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in Marioriwawo District have demonstrated good competency. Based on observations at the SPF UPTD of SDN 223 Lapince, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are able to create engaging learning by building stimulus-response relationships to encourage active student engagement in class [37]. The use of diverse learning methods such as lectures, discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and active learning techniques such as matching cards demonstrates efforts to diversify methods to maintain student enthusiasm. The use of visual media such as PowerPoint is also part of the strategy to improve student understanding of the teaching material.

According to a teacher at the SPF UPTD SDN 149 Amessangeng, PAI teachers strive to foster interest in learning through an inspirational approach that encourages students to participate in class activities. While not all teachers master all methods, the diversity of techniques applied—such as debates, guessing quizzes, and chain questions—reflects the teachers' understanding of modern learning theories and strategies. Thus, Islamic Religious Education teachers in Marioriwawo District have demonstrated their mastery of applied learning theory through the use of varied methods and innovative approaches. This contributes to the creation of an active, creative, and enjoyable learning environment, reflecting the integration of learning theory into real-life teaching practices.

3.1.4 Organize Learning Which Educate

Observations of the Islamic Religious Education learning process at the UPTD SPF SDN 165 Asanae showed that it had not yet met all indicators for the use/strengthening of learning resources/learning media. This was evident during the observation that the

teacher did not use learning media such as a laptop/computer, LCD, or OHP. However, the teacher used picture media to provide examples. Based on these observations, a lesson plan review was conducted. The informant's statement stated that he used PowerPoint media in his role as an Islamic Religious Education teacher at the UPTD SPF SDN 147 Kalempang. For learning in class, He Also use media additional in the form of guessing quiz card. Based on observations during the teaching process, Islamic Religious Education teachers possess strong pedagogical competence. This is evident when they consistently base their teaching on the established lesson plan (RPP), use appropriate learning media and resources, even if some are not mentioned in the RPP, and create engaging and educational learning experiences.

3.1.5 Communication Skills

Based on field observations, Islamic Religious Education teachers at elementary schools in Marioriwawo District demonstrate excellent communication skills, both verbally and in writing. They deliver material in a clear, structured manner that is easily understood by students. Furthermore, their teaching style is adapted to the classroom context and occasionally incorporates regional languages (such as Bugis), which helps strengthen the bond between teachers and students. Teachers also demonstrate openness to student opinions and active participation, particularly during group discussions. One informant emphasized the importance of avoiding the impression of teacher superiority, suggesting they have all the answers, as this can undermine students' motivation to learn [38]. Thus, it can be concluded that Islamic Religious Education teachers in Marioriwawo District possess strong competencies in building effective and empathetic educational communication. They also uphold the value of politeness in language and integrate local values to create a humanistic and participatory learning environment.

3.1.6 Conducting Assessment and Evaluation

In their learning assessment practices, PAI teachers in Marioriwawo District have implemented evaluations using various approaches. Information from the SPF UPTD of SDN 223 Lapince states that assessments are conducted in the form of daily written tests, which include multiple-choice and descriptive questions. However, evaluations are not always formal, as teachers also assess student activity and engagement during the learning process [39]. Furthermore, according to an informant from the SPF UPTD at SDN 164 Pacora, assessment of the learning process is conducted through observation of student attitudes and participation in discussions, including sportsmanship and cooperation. Meanwhile, assessment of learning outcomes is usually conducted through daily tests [40]. Additional statements from other teachers indicated that they also assessed students directly during discussions, observing student participation in expressing opinions and collaboration within groups. Overall, this demonstrates that Islamic Religious Education teachers focus not only on the final outcome but also on the student learning process through authentic assessment.

3.1.7 Utilizing Assessment and Evaluation Results for Learning Purposes

Following up on learning evaluation results is a crucial part of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher's learning cycle. An informant from the SPF Technical Implementation Unit (UPTD SPF) at SDN 148 Sanuale explained that teachers provide remedial programs for students who have not yet achieved mastery, as well as enrichment programs for students who have exceeded the success criteria. Remedial programs are provided through open-ended analytical questions completed outside of class hours.

Meanwhile, a teacher from the SPF UPTD of SDN 147 Kalempang stated that after the test was conducted, the teacher would analyze the difficulty level of the questions based on student feedback, then implement remedial and enrichment programs. A similar sentiment was expressed by Supena et al. [41], who stated that evaluation of learning outcomes was carried out through tests, which were then analyzed to identify student weaknesses, and the results became the basis for implementing follow-up actions in the form of remedial and enrichment programs. From these various statements, it can be concluded that Islamic Religious Education teachers in Marioriwawo District have demonstrated good competence in utilizing learning evaluation results. Assessment results are not only used as a measure of learning success but also as a basis for planning further learning interventions to support students' overall competency achievement.

3.2 Principal's Strategy in Improving the Pedagogical Competence of Islamic Education Teachers

The findings indicate that the principals of elementary schools in Marioriwawo District actively implement programs to improve the pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. According to an informant from the SPF UPTD of SDN 164 Pacora, these efforts are based on the belief that the quality of learning is highly dependent on the quality of teachers, which is determined by their ability to design and manage the learning process effectively. The principals also recognize that pedagogical competence is a fundamental aspect that every educator must possess to be able to carry out their professional duties optimally.

Several informants emphasized the importance of mastering pedagogical competencies as a prerequisite for educational success and an indicator of teacher professionalism. Furthermore, with the gradual implementation of the Independent Curriculum, teachers are required to be more adaptive and continuously develop their skills in managing learning. Improving teachers' pedagogical competence is carried out through continuous and collaborative evaluation. School principals are responsible for providing various tools to enhance teacher professionalism, such as strengthening academic qualifications, training and workshops, certification programs, and providing access to learning resources and opportunities for self-development.

An informant from the SPF UPTD of SDN 153 Walimpong stated that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are also encouraged to be active in professional forums such as the Teacher Working Group (KKG) and teacher learning communities. Furthermore, teachers participate in training, conduct peer observations, and even write scientific papers as part of their ongoing professional development efforts. The principal's support is also reflected in the implementation of training sessions, which involve the presence of experienced speakers relevant to pedagogical topics. Strong pedagogical competence directly contributes to improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Therefore, school principals play a strategic role in identifying training needs and designing appropriate interventions for teacher development. States that improving this competence encompasses all aspects of learning, from planning to evaluating learning outcomes.

In the context of learning assessment, the principal is also responsible for monitoring the quality of teacher performance. According to Yang et al. [42], this is done through observation, documentation, and analysis of teacher practice in the classroom. This evaluation aims to assess teachers' understanding of student characteristics and the effectiveness of the learning process. In addition to internal supervision by the principal, monitoring is also carried out through external supervisors to assess the effectiveness of

the competency improvement program. The principal of the UPTD SPF SDN 195 Barae stated that the strategies implemented include: (1) preparing learning tools such as material analysis, lesson plans, and question outlines; (2) developing teaching materials and learning media; (3) analyzing student needs; and (4) evaluating learning outcomes to assess student achievement.

Thus, the principal's strategy in improving the pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers includes improving discipline, active involvement of teachers in various forums and professional training, implementing periodic supervision, and providing special assistance for teachers who have not yet achieved the required competency standards. expected.

Figure 2. Principal's Strategy in Improving the Pedagogical Competence of Islamic Education Teachers
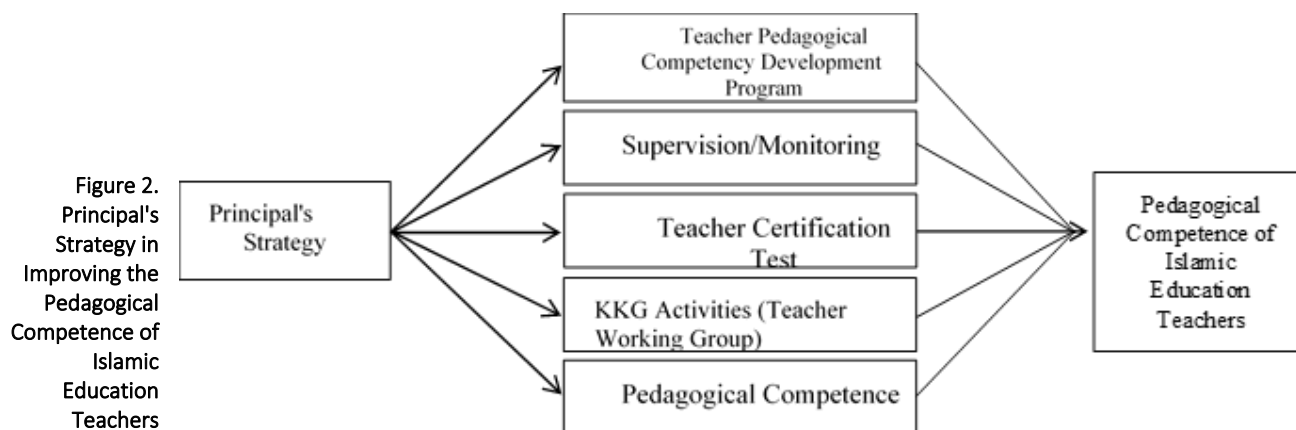
3.3 Obstacles and Solutions of School Principals in Improving the Pedagogical Competence of Islamic Education Teachers

School principals' efforts to improve the pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are inseparable from various challenges and obstacles arising from both internal and external aspects. These factors include limited time, energy, and budget available to teachers; low teacher awareness and motivation regarding the importance of competency development; and minimal infrastructure and supporting facilities within the school environment. As explained, other obstacles also occur in the implementation of MGMP activities, such as inadequate resource persons and inconsistencies in training schedules with teachers' teaching duties, which result in low training effectiveness.

Another technical obstacle arises in the form of limited access to technology during online training, which impacts the effectiveness of learning and teacher engagement in self-development.) note that mismatched teacher educational backgrounds, limited learning media, and suboptimal classroom conditions also hinder the development of teachers' comprehensive pedagogical competencies. However, several supporting factors contribute to the success of PAI teachers' pedagogical competency improvement programs. These factors include academic qualifications, teaching experience, availability of teaching materials, and active involvement in MGMP activities. Internal factors such as motivation, active participation, and personal experience play a crucial role in successful competency improvement, while external factors, such as support from family, community, and educational institutions, including certification and training programs, also contribute significantly.

Furthermore, teachers' initiative to develop themselves, openness to principal supervision, and good communication among educators are part of the solution to the various obstacles face. Concrete strategies implemented by principals to overcome these obstacles include conducting professional training such as workshops, increasing the intensity of learning supervision, regular monitoring, and encouraging active teacher

participation in MGMP forums. Principals are also required to possess skills in time management, conflict resolution, and maintaining high teacher quality and understanding within the context of pedagogical development.

Thus, although there are a number of obstacles in the process of improving the pedagogical competence of Islamic Education teachers, school principals can overcome them through strategic planning, strong collaboration, and continuous strengthening of teacher capacity so that the quality of learning in schools is maintained and continues to improve.
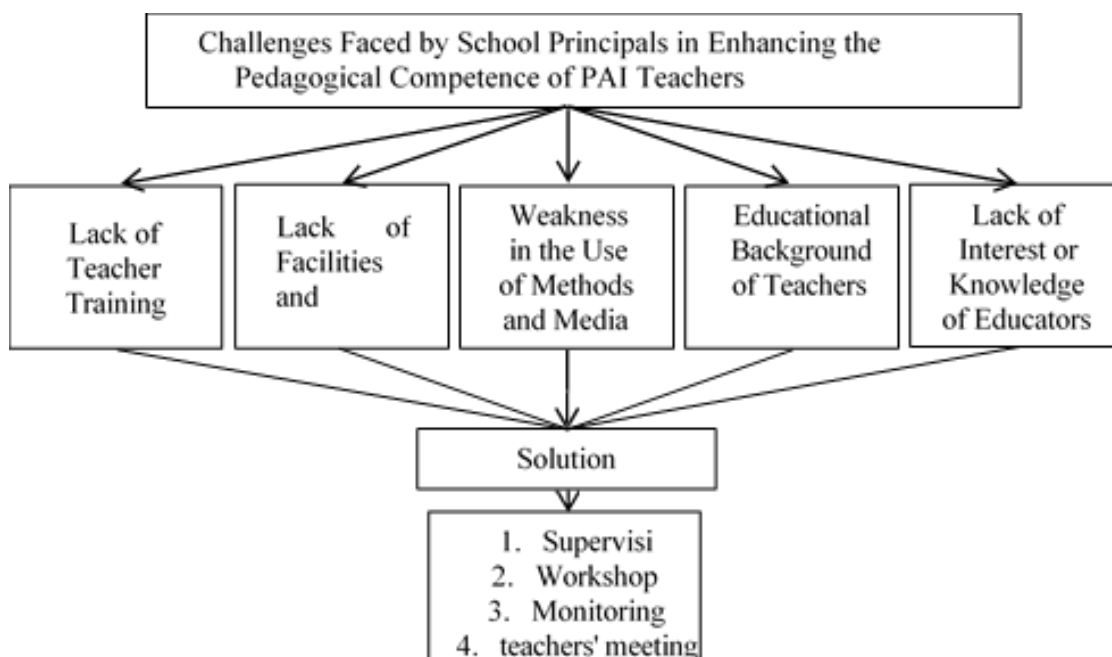

Figure 3. Obstacles and Solution Improving Competence Pedagogy Islamic Education Teacher

Teacher competence in carrying out the teaching and learning process is determined not only by their own competence but also by the competence of all those involved in managing all available resources, and teachers have not optimally developed their personal and social competencies. Research results indicate that problems in improving teacher competence include low motivation, transfers due to political factors, low Classroom Action Research (CAR) skills, an instant mentality, and low awareness of sharing knowledge among teachers. Solutions include increasing the role of MGMPs, encouraging more active teacher professional organizations, creating teacher journals, establishing teacher libraries, government incentives for teacher CARK, and holding scientific writing competitions. Improving teacher pedagogical competence can be done through online seminars and workshops through social media and improving skills in using digital technology to improve the quality and attractiveness of learning. This perspective has been partially developed in the field, but there are still some that have not been implemented, such as the need for teacher libraries, teacher journals, teacher PTK incentives, and scientific paper competitions.

4. Conclusion

PAI teachers at elementary schools in Marioriwawo District possess pedagogical competencies that meet national regulatory standards. These include the ability to improve the existing curriculum, understand learning theories and principles, conduct learning, communicate effectively, empathize, and be polite with students, conduct assessments and evaluations, and use assessment and evaluation results for learning purposes. The principal's strategy in linking the pedagogical competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers through workshops, supervision, communication between

the principal and teachers, and training through workshops, so that educators can understand the guiding principles of educational research and analyze findings. (1) Supervision, aims to directly find out how Islamic Religious Education teachers carry out learning activities and assess the educator's ability to control the classroom environment during the teaching and learning process. (2) Islamic Religious Education teacher training is able to increase knowledge, insight, and experience for self-development and educational goals as educators who are expected to have good pedagogical competence. (3) Workshops make Islamic Religious Education teachers understand the principles of PTK, and must be able to interpret research results.

The lack of teacher training, facilities and infrastructure, and the lack of face-to-face training are obstacles to improving the pedagogical competence of PAI teachers at elementary schools in Marioriwawo District. As a solution, the principal regularly holds MGMP, educational courses, supervises, and meets with educators. The implication of this research is that school principals are required to be more dynamic, creative, and innovative in carrying out their duties and functions as leaders, managers, administrators, motivators, supervisors, and entrepreneurs. School principals have a mission to improve the quality of Islamic religious education in elementary schools, and this can be achieved if supported by competence Teacher (specifically pedagogical). Focus study This only on aspects of pedagogical competence, so further research is needed that focuses on aspects of professional, personal, and social competence.

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6. Declaration

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