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Building the Professionalism of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in the Digital Era

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Abstract

The rapid development of digital technology has drastically transformed the world of education and significantly impacted the demands placed on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. This study aims to investigate how PAI teachers build and enhance their professionalism amidst the digital transformation. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data was collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving teachers from various educational institutions. The results indicate that PAI teachers generally recognize the importance of digital literacy as a crucial part of their professional expertise and have begun integrating various digital tools such as learning management systems, multimedia content, and Quran-based applications into their teaching methods. Teachers employ a variety of strategies to improve their digital and pedagogical skills, including participating in training programs, self-study, and collaboration with colleagues. However, structural challenges such as limited technological infrastructure, a lack of relevant training, and uneven digital literacy levels among teachers hinder optimal implementation. This study concludes that strengthening PAI teacher professionalism in the digital era requires systemic support, appropriate training, infrastructure improvements, and continuous pedagogical innovation to maintain Islamic values in technology-based learning.

| Keywords | ***Teacher Professionalism, Islamic Religious Education, Digital Era*** |

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to the education system, including in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teaching. The digitalization of education not only transforms learning media and methods but also demands a transformation in the role and professionalism of teachers. PAI teachers are no longer simply relying on mastery of Islamic material and conventional pedagogy; instead, they are required to possess digital literacy, technology-based pedagogical skills, and the ability to integrate Islamic values into contextual and meaningful digital learning (Chaeruman, 2019; Arif, Aziz, & Ma'arif, 2024).

The professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers has unique characteristics because it is closely related to the formation of character, morals, and spirituality in students. These professional challenges are increasingly complex in the digital era, where learning takes place in virtual spaces, potentially reducing direct role models and the depth of emotional interaction between teachers and students. On the one hand, technology offers significant opportunities for innovation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning; however, poorly managed use of technology risks shifting the essence of religious education from value formation to merely information transfer (Aliya Rosyidah & Fitriatin, 2024).

Various previous studies have shown that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers have begun utilizing digital platforms, multimedia media, and Islamic learning applications as part of their adaptation to the demands of the digital era (Nadia & Waqfin, 2023; Ritonga, 2024; Wahid, 2024). However, most of these studies still emphasize the normative and conceptual aspects of teacher professionalism or focus on general technological mastery. Studies that delve deeply into the empirical experiences of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in building professionalism, digital pedagogical adaptation strategies, and efforts to maintain the integration of Islamic values in daily learning practices are still relatively limited (Shodikin, Wahid, & Damanhuri, 2025).

Based on these research gaps, the novelty of this study lies in its descriptive qualitative approach, which examines Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher

professionalism holistically from the perspective of teacher experience. This research not only captures teachers' digital competence but also reveals how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers interpret professionalism in the digital era, develop technology-based pedagogical strategies, and uphold Islamic values   in digital learning. Therefore, this study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to strengthening the concept of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism in the digital era, as well as practical contributions to developing more contextual and sustainable teacher policies and training.

2. METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to deeply understand the phenomenon of developing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism in the digital era. This approach was chosen because the issue of teacher professionalism is not only related to the technical aspects of learning but also encompasses the experiences, values, and meanings teachers construct in the process of adapting to technology. A qualitative approach allows researchers to holistically explore empirical realities based on the perspectives of teachers as the primary research subjects (Adnan and Latief, 2020).

The research subjects consisted of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at the elementary and secondary levels, selected through a purposive sampling technique. This technique was used because informants were determined based on certain criteria, such as a minimum of two years of service, experience utilizing digital technology in learning, and willingness to provide in-depth information. The study was conducted in several types of public and private schools, as well as Islamic schools (madrasah) to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the variations in technology implementation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning.

The research procedure includes four main stages. In the pre-fieldwork stage, the researcher prepares the research design, determines the focus of the study, conducts a literature review, and develops research instruments. The researcher also coordinates

with schools and obtains permits. The fieldwork stage involves collecting data through interviews, observation, and documentation. This process provides a direct overview of teachers' actual practices in developing their professionalism amidst the demands of digitalization. The data analysis stage begins early in the data collection process, allowing the researcher to deepen the information based on field findings. The final stage is the preparation of a research report that systematically summarizes all findings and analysis.

The primary research instrument is the researcher herself, who determines the direction of the research and interprets the data. Supporting instruments include semi-structured interview guides, observation sheets, field notes, cameras or digital devices for documentation, and official documents such as Lesson Implementation Plans (RPP), digital teaching materials, and teacher training archives. All these instruments are designed to obtain data on teacher competencies, their use of digital media, and their strategies for developing professionalism in the digital age.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, lesson observations, and documentation studies. Interviews were used to explore teachers' perceptions, experiences, and how they build professional competencies in a technological context. Observations were conducted to directly observe how teachers utilize digital tools, manage technology-based classes, and conduct digital pedagogical interactions. Documentation was used to strengthen findings through analysis of learning documents, digital media, and teacher training records. (Adnan and Latief 2020, 98)

The collected data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis techniques, which include data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction was achieved by sorting and grouping data based on relevant themes. Data presentation was done in narrative form and with relationship patterns to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions were drawn continuously and verified through source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking to ensure data validity. These techniques ensured that the researchers' interpretations aligned with the reality on the ground.

This research method is expected to provide an accurate understanding of the processes, strategies, and challenges faced by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in developing their professionalism amidst the development of digital technology. The descriptive qualitative approach allows this study to in-depth describe the dynamics of teacher adaptation to the digitalization of education and its relevance to improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research on the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism in the digital era indicates that teachers' adaptation to technological developments occurs gradually and is influenced by various internal and external factors. This study found that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism in the digital era is determined not only by mastery of pedagogical competencies, but also by the ability to adapt to technology, spiritual integrity, and a commitment to continuous self-development. These findings were identified through in-depth interviews, learning observations, and document analysis obtained from various schools selected for the study.

First, the results indicate that most Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers have a high awareness of the importance of digital literacy as part of their professionalism. This awareness arises from the demands of educational institutions, changes in student characteristics, and the need to improve the quality of learning. Many teachers stated that today's students are a generation so closely connected to technology that conventional learning models are no longer effective. Therefore, teachers feel the need to update their skills to deliver relevant and engaging learning. This motivation to adapt is also driven by increased access to digital training provided by the government, schools, and the private sector.

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The research also shows that the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education teachers in the digital era is not only measured by technical skills, but also by their ability to integrate Islamic values into the use of technology. Islamic Religious Education teachers have a moral responsibility to ensure that the use of technology does not diminish the spirit of religious education, which prioritizes exemplary behavior, morals, and spiritual depth. However, some teachers expressed concerns that technology-based interactions could diminish the emotional closeness between teachers and students. In online learning situations, for example, teachers find it more difficult to monitor students' character, observe religious behavior, or provide personal advice. These concerns highlight the need to develop new pedagogical strategies to ensure that moral and spiritual values can still be instilled through digital media.

Observations also revealed that the integration of technology into Islamic Religious Education learning has given rise to innovations previously rare in conventional learning. Teachers have begun building digital learning communities through discussion groups, online forums, or messaging apps to support students outside of class hours. Some teachers use short Islamic preaching videos, Islamic educational content, or religious podcasts as reflection materials for students. These practices not only enhance teachers' creativity, but also enrich students' learning experiences with broader sources of knowledge.

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Overall, the research findings indicate that developing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism in the digital era is a dynamic process influenced by individual competencies, the work environment, institutional support, and technological developments. PAI teachers have demonstrated considerable adaptive capacity, although they still face a number of challenges related to digital literacy and the integration of Islamic values into technology-based learning. These findings emphasize that enhancing the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers requires a holistic approach that encompasses enhanced pedagogical competency, access to relevant digital training, infrastructure support, and the development of learning strategies that maintain the essence of religious education amidst digital transformation.

Islamic Education Teacher Professionalism in the Context of Digital Transformation

The rapid digital transformation in the world of education has significant consequences for the role and professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. While previously teacher professionalism was primarily measured by mastery of religious material, spiritual depth, and traditional pedagogical skills, in the digital era, the parameters of professionalism have expanded in meaning. PAI teachers are now required to possess technological competence, digital literacy, the ability to innovate, and the ability to adapt to the ever-changing development of applications and learning systems. Research shows that PAI teachers are aware of this shift in professional demands, particularly because the current generation of students has grown up in a fast-paced, instant, and highly interactive digital culture. They are accustomed to visual information, multimedia, and various forms of digital communication, making conventional learning methods less able to capture their attention if not integrated with technology. (Safiqo and Ghofur, n.d., 766–67)

In this context, the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education teachers is not only about mastering digital devices, but also about integrating Islamic values

into the technology they use. Religious education has unique characteristics, namely a strong emphasis on role models, habituation, and deepening spiritual values. When learning is conducted digitally, Islamic Religious Education teachers face the challenge of maintaining the essence of character building and moral strengthening through indirect or non-face-to-face media. Research has found that some teachers feel a loss of emotional closeness with students when learning takes place online, so they must seek new strategies to maintain the process of value formation. This is where new professional competencies are needed: teachers must be able to use technology not merely as a means of conveying information, but as a medium for instilling values through creative, communicative learning designs that touch students' affective aspects. (Chaeruman 2019, 657)

Furthermore, the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education teachers in the digital era is also demonstrated through their ability to develop relevant, engaging, and modern religious learning content. Examples of this professional practice are seen when teachers design learning videos that visualize concepts of worship, create interactive presentations on morals, or utilize digital Quran applications to teach tajwid. These innovations not only facilitate student understanding but also enrich their learning experience. Professional teachers are those who are able to bridge the gap between normative Islamic values and practical technology that is relevant to students' daily lives. (Sholichah et al., n.d., 32)

Furthermore, digital transformation also requires Islamic Religious Education teachers to continuously develop themselves through continuous learning. Professionalism in this context means a willingness to continuously learn, participate in training, and improve digital literacy. Teachers who are strongly motivated to learn technology tend to be more adaptable, innovative, and confident in their teaching. Conversely, teachers who are reluctant to adapt to technology are easily left behind and face difficulties in carrying out their professional duties. Research shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers who proactively participate in digital training have better skills in designing modern learning, while teachers who lack training tend to experience technical barriers that hinder their professional development (Firdaus et al., n.d., 34).

Overall, Islamic Religious Education teacher professionalism in the context of digital transformation is a combination of in-depth religious competence, modern pedagogical skills, technological proficiency, moral integrity, and a willingness to continuously develop. Professionalism is no longer defined statically, but dynamically, according to technological developments and student needs. Digital transformation ultimately presents both challenges and significant opportunities for Islamic Religious Education teachers to develop their roles as relevant educators in

the modern era without losing the spirit of the Islamic values   that are at the core of their duties.

Islamic Education Teachers' Strategies for Developing Digital and Pedagogical Competencies

Research results show that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers implement various strategies to develop their digital and pedagogical competencies as part of their professionalism in the digital era. These strategies emerged in response to changing learning patterns among students who are increasingly familiar with technology. PAI teachers recognize that without adequate digital skills, they will struggle to create effective, engaging, and relevant learning that meets the needs of the modern generation. Therefore, competency improvement efforts are carried out through formal training, independent learning, and collaboration between teachers. (Setyowati et al. 2025, 4–6)

One of the main strategies used by teachers is participating in digital literacy training organized by the government, educational institutions, or online platforms. This training covers the use of Learning Management Systems (LMS), digital presentation tools, creating learning videos, and managing online classes through video conferencing applications. Although the training material is often general in nature, PAI teachers still utilize it to strengthen basic skills before adapting them to the context of Islamic pedagogy. Participation in this training has significantly increased teachers' confidence in using technology in learning.

In addition to formal training, many Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers develop their digital competencies independently. They follow YouTube tutorials, read articles about learning technology, or practice creating simple digital media such as posters, infographics, and short videos on Islamic topics. This independent learning strategy is especially important for teachers in schools with limited facilities or inadequate training support. Independence in learning technology demonstrates the high professional commitment of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. (Kurniawati, n.d., 87)

In terms of pedagogy, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers implement innovative strategies to integrate technology with religious learning methods. Examples include the use of interactive media to teach Tajweed, video-based prayer simulations, digital quizzes for evaluation, and online discussion forums for moral learning. This technology not only enriches teaching methods but also provides space for students to explore the material independently and enjoyably. The integration of

technology with Islamic pedagogy requires teachers' creativity in adapting content to maintain Islamic values. (Damayanti and Ridwan 2024, 3–5)

Collaboration between teachers is also an important strategy. Teachers exchange experiences, share digital materials, and provide mentoring to colleagues who are less technologically proficient. This collaboration strengthens a culture of professionalism and accelerates the process of improving digital competency in the school environment. (Wahid 2024, 87). Overall, the strategies implemented by Islamic Religious Education teachers demonstrate that developing digital and pedagogical competencies is an ongoing process that requires support, a willingness to learn, and innovation. With the right strategies, Islamic Religious Education teachers can adapt effectively to the demands of digital transformation.

Structural Challenges and Solutions for Strengthening Islamic Education Teacher Professionalism

In the process of developing the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in the digital era, research shows that several structural challenges affect teachers' ability to adapt and develop their digital competencies. These structural challenges are directly related to the work environment, educational policies, technological facilities, and school institutional support. One of the biggest challenges is limited digital infrastructure, especially in schools located in remote areas or those with limited budgets. The lack of technological equipment such as computers, unstable internet connections, and the lack of digital learning spaces make it difficult for teachers to integrate technology into the learning process. When infrastructure is inadequate, teachers' motivation to innovate tends to decline. (Umam 2025, 2)

Besides infrastructure, another structural challenge lies in the lack of technology training specifically designed for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers. Most technology training is general and does not specifically address the needs of Islamic pedagogy. PAI teachers need more focused guidance on how to package Islamic material in an engaging digital format while remaining compliant with religious values. This inconsistency in training materials makes it difficult for some teachers to adapt technology to PAI learning. This is even more complicated for teachers who still have low levels of digital literacy, especially senior teachers who are not yet familiar with technology. (Rohili et al. 2025, 6)

Institutional support is also a significant structural factor. Schools with visionary leadership and the opportunity for teacher innovation tend to have Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers who are more professional in using technology.

Conversely, schools that remain trapped in traditional, bureaucratic management patterns and receive minimal pedagogical supervision discourage teachers from improving their competencies. PAI teachers often feel burdened by excessive administration, severely limiting their time for digital exploration. (Panjaitan et al. 2024, 4)

To address these challenges, systemic and sustainable solutions to strengthen professionalism are needed. First, the government and schools need to improve technology facilities so that all teachers have access to adequate digital devices. Providing stable internet access, multimedia rooms, and digital learning tools are the first steps to creating a modern learning environment. Second, teacher training must be designed to be more contextual and relevant to the characteristics of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Training that integrates Islamic values   with technology—for example, creating educational da'wah videos, developing morality-based digital modules, or utilizing digital Quran applications—will be far more effective than general training. (Efendi et al. 2024, 57)

5. CONCLUSION

Research on the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher professionalism in the digital era shows that the transformation of technology-based education has significant implications for the roles, competencies, and professional development strategies of teachers. PAI teacher professionalism can no longer be understood narrowly as the ability to master religious material and implement traditional learning methods, but has evolved into a multidimensional concept encompassing digital skills, modern pedagogical abilities, innovation, and a deep understanding of Islamic values. The digital era demands that PAI teachers balance the use of technology with the implementation of the spiritual, moral, and exemplary functions that are at the core of religious education.

The research indicates that PAI teachers generally recognize the importance of digital literacy as part of their professionalism. They understand that digital generation students have different learning characteristics, thus requiring religious instruction to be delivered through more interactive and relevant media. PAI teachers have begun utilizing various digital platforms such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), multimedia videos, digital Quran applications, and online discussion forums to enhance learning effectiveness. The use of digital media not only helps students understand abstract material but also encourages

independent and creative learning. However, teachers' abilities in utilizing technology still vary, influenced by age, experience, motivation, and school support.

This study also revealed that strategies for developing Islamic Religious Education teachers' digital and pedagogical competencies include formal training, independent learning, and collaboration between teachers. Teachers who actively participate in training show significant improvements in digital skills, while teachers who receive less training rely on independent learning through online tutorials. Collaboration is an effective strategy because it allows teachers to exchange experiences, share digital materials, and provide mentoring to colleagues who are less tech-savvy. This strengthens a culture of professionalism and creates a more adaptive learning environment.

Based on the overall findings, it can be concluded that developing Islamic Religious Education teachers' professionalism in the digital era requires a systemic and sustainable approach. Efforts to improve digital competency must be accompanied by strengthening Islamic values in technology-based learning practices. The government, schools, and the community have a strategic role in providing facilities, relevant training, and policies that support teacher innovation. Thus, Islamic Religious Education teachers are expected to transform into professional, adaptive educators, while maintaining the spirit of Islamic education amidst ever-changing technological developments.

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