PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS AND IMPROVING LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Abstract:
This article highlights the critical role of teacher competence, particularly pedagogical competence, in educating children with special needs to help them optimize their potential. Pedagogical competence enables teachers to effectively manage and develop the learning process, thereby enhancing learning outcomes. However, in practice, many Islamic Religious Education teachers fall short of these competency standards, which adversely affects the learning outcomes of students with special needs. This study is based on field research employing qualitative methods at the Junior High School for Children with Special Needs (SMPLB) in Lumajang. The findings indicate that improving learning outcomes requires active collaboration between teachers and students, particularly students with special needs, and demands teachers who possess strong pedagogical competence.

Keywords: *Pedagogical Competence, Learning Outcome, Students whit Special Needs*

INTRODUCTION

The current educational challenges primarily stem from a paradigm crisis, characterized by social inequalities or a mismatch between desired outcomes and the paradigms employed to achieve those objectives. A paradigm is defined as a framework of thought or a methodological approach (Moh. Suardi, 2018: 2-3). Education serves as a fundamental resource and a critical means for enhancing the quality of human resources. Therefore, improving the quality of educational institutions is essential to elevate the overall standard of education. The quality of education is reflected in the added value and creativity generated by educational institutions, whether in the form of products, services, or innovations, enabling them to compete effectively in the labor market (Indra Bastian, 2006: 184).

According to the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, competency is defined as a set of knowledge, skills, and behaviors that must be possessed, internalized, and mastered by teachers or lecturers in carrying out their professional duties (Law No. 14, 2005). As stated in the law, teacher competencies consist of four key domains: pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies (Wina Sanjaya, 2008: 19).

This study focuses on the pedagogical competence of teachers. Pedagogical competence refers to a teacher's ability to effectively manage student learning.

Teachers are expected to facilitate learning processes that enhance students' abilities and foster noticeable improvements. Learning activities should be designed to be engaging, enjoyable, and motivating to encourage active student participation. Furthermore, educational institutions are required to provide adequate opportunities for students to express creativity and develop independent attitudes, aligning with their interests, talents, and stages of physical and psychological development (Rifma, 2016: 2-3).

Various issues related to teachers' pedagogical competence require serious attention and action from multiple stakeholders to ensure these problems can be gradually resolved. One of the strategies and efforts that can be undertaken is the improvement and reform of teacher competence, particularly pedagogical competence. The development of teachers' pedagogical competence can no longer be delayed, as any effort made by teachers to support education, if not accompanied by competence development, will eventually affect the quality of classroom learning services (Rifma, 2016: 3).

Teachers serve as figures of leadership, builders, and character shapers for their students. A teacher's role is not merely a profession but also a humanitarian and social responsibility. Hence, teachers are often referred to as "unsung heroes." The professional responsibilities of teachers require them to continuously develop their expertise. Training, teaching, and educating students are integral parts of a teacher's professional duties. Specifically, the task of educating involves transmitting and instilling life values in students so that they can adapt and thrive in the communities where they live (Rifma, 2016: 18).

Teachers must set an example for their students, especially Islamic education teachers, who are recognized for their understanding of Islamic teachings and principles. Therefore, Islamic education teachers must exemplify good morals and behavior alongside their knowledge and academic qualifications. Teachers should also focus on four key aspects: training, teaching, educating, and conducting research (Laela Hamidah Harahap, 2019: 138). Additionally, teachers must understand the concept of being an educator as a model for students to emulate. They must possess specific qualities that reflect the true personality of an Islamic education teacher.

In the Qur'an, Surah An-Nahl verse 125 explains that:

ادْعُ إِلَىٰ سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِٱلْحِكْمَةِ وَٱلْمَوْعِظَةِ ٱلْحَسَنَةِ ۖ وَجَٰدِلْهُم بِٱلَّتِى هِىَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَن سَبِيلِهِۦ ۖ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِٱلْمُهْتَدِينَ

"Call (people) to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching, and argue with them in the best way. Surely your Lord knows best who has strayed from His path, and He knows best those who are guided."

The meaning of the verse above emphasizes that teaching should be conducted with wisdom. Wisdom refers to an approach or method that is prudent, patient, and capable of creating positive impacts on its recipients. It is essential to recognize that polite and respectful speech can only be achieved by educators who continuously enhance their knowledge. This knowledge includes both Islamic insights (*shafaqah Islamiyah*) and broader social and human sciences, such as education, psychology, communication, and other related disciplines.

In contemporary education, Islamic education teachers are expected to play a role in shaping students' character, morality, ethics, and personality so that

they can distinguish between good and bad. Islamic education also aims to instill knowledge in students that aligns with Islamic principles and values (Laela Hamidah Harahap, 2019: 145-146).

Based on Article 31, Paragraph 1 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, it can be concluded that the state fully provides opportunities for children with disabilities to access education of equal quality to that of other children (Endang Switri, 2020: 1). Children with disabilities or special needs are those who, in significant ways, differ from others in their humanity. They may face physical, psychological, cognitive, or social challenges that hinder the fulfillment of their goals and potential. This group includes children who are blind, deaf, non-verbal, physically impaired, cognitively delayed, or emotionally disturbed. Such children are categorized as children with special needs or exceptional children (Endang Switri, 2020: 25).

Parents of children with special needs often face numerous challenges in caring for their children. These issues frequently arise due to a lack of inclusivity in their environments. Hence, parents need to socialize within their communities to share experiences and seek advice or solutions to the problems they face. Raising awareness about disabilities among the general public is also essential.

Another significant issue is that children with special needs are often victims of sexual abuse. Their vulnerabilities can be exploited, making such situations deeply concerning, especially if the children lack proper education. Children with special needs require protection from various parties as they have the same rights as other children.

The Ministry of Education and Culture has ensured that all children with special needs must continue to receive education, both during the current COVID-19 pandemic and in normal conditions. Indonesia, with its vast and diverse regions, ethnicities, and cultures, shares a common goal: to provide children with special needs the same opportunities as other children. These children should be respected, as they have desires similar to their peers. When they feel valued, they also experience equal opportunities in education. Therefore, they should not be underestimated. Collaboration is vital to improving the quality of education in Indonesia, ensuring equal opportunities for all, whether for children with special needs or typical children. This will ultimately lead to more competent and qualified human resources in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach, which is a research procedure aimed at producing descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words and observed behaviors (Wayan Suwendra, 2018: 4). The type of research used is descriptive research. Descriptive research aims to describe or illustrate a problem systematically and accurately. It seeks to portray activities, events, and situations comprehensively.

The study was conducted at SMPLB Lumajang, with the target subjects being Islamic Education (PAI) teachers. Teachers play a crucial role in the learning process; not only general education teachers but also Islamic Education teachers significantly contribute to students' education. Islamic Education can shape students' morals and character. The research was carried out over approximately one month.

This study utilized two data sources: primary and secondary data. The data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. The

data analysis process involved data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the research findings, it is evident that a teacher should continuously develop their competencies to support classroom learning and enhance their teaching knowledge. It is undeniable that pedagogical competence is crucial to develop, as it encompasses all aspects related to the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

As a teacher, there is undoubtedly a greater responsibility, as they are entrusted by parents to guide their children toward a better future, not only in terms of academic learning but also in shaping the students' behavior and character. Based on the data obtained through interviews, observations, and documentation, it can be concluded that in developing pedagogical competence, Islamic Education (PAI) teachers employ specific strategies. These include participating in professional development activities such as workshops, training sessions, PAI teacher working groups (KKG PAI), and seminars. The following are some of the sections included in the findings:

Understanding Students

In terms of understanding students, the activities he participates in to support the learning process in the classroom include joining the PAI (Islamic Education) teacher working group. In this working group, the activities usually involve sharing experiences with other PAI teachers. As a result, through this activity, he not only gains various methods to understand students, but also acquires additional knowledge and insights, which helps enhance his competencies in line with the profession he holds at present.

In addition to participating in activities outside of school, he also keeps up to date with developments in education today and is involved in several organizations in Lumajang Regency. Although he is still a university student, he remains professional in teaching and does not neglect his duties as both a teacher and a student. It is undeniable that he can easily understand the character of his students, as he is an active teacher in higher education and in various organizations.

Designing Learning

In terms of designing lessons, this is closely related to the lesson plan or teaching module. A lesson plan covers the core competencies, basic competencies, indicators, learning resources, media, methods, steps in teaching, and evaluation of learning. To develop the lesson plan, the PAI (Islamic Education) teacher participates in activities such as curriculum workshops. However, these workshops are not specifically for teachers of students with disabilities but are general curriculum workshops. Despite this, it does not dampen his enthusiasm to continue learning and developing his competencies. There is always something valuable to be learned from every activity attended. The development of lesson planning can be done independently or in groups within the Teacher Working Group (KKG).

This lesson planning is a mandatory task that teachers must complete before conducting the teaching and learning process. The lesson plan must also undergo a review by the school principal and the vice principal in charge of the curriculum. In creating lesson plans, teachers are required to pay close attention and not be careless, as this plan becomes the key to the learning process and must

continually be refined to ensure it meets students' needs and keeps up with the developments in education today.

Implementation of Learning

In terms of implementing the lesson, this is the follow-up to the lesson plan that has been created, or in other words, the implementation of the lesson plan. The teacher's strategy to develop his competencies in the learning process is by participating in activities such as the Teacher Working Group (KKG), which helps with anything related to the teaching materials for which he is responsible. In the KKG forum, the PAI teacher can also share about teaching methods that can assist teachers in the learning process.

The media used in the teaching process also supports the success of teaching and learning. In this case, the PAI teacher at SMPLB Lumajang often uses educational puppets, videos, pictures, and general books as tools to support the materials to be delivered. However, there are no specific books for students with disabilities, so what the PAI teacher at SMPLB Lumajang does is gather materials from general books that align with the core competencies and basic competencies for students with special needs, which will later be compiled into a teacher's handbook module. This is done to facilitate the teaching and learning process.

Designing and Implementing Learning Evaluation

Learning evaluation is conducted to assess how well students are able to understand the material that has been taught both inside and outside the classroom. In terms of implementation, the PAI teacher at SMPLB Lumajang uses oral tests, written tests, and practical assessments. This classroom assessment is carried out by the teacher to measure how well students understand the material that has been taught, which will later serve as a benchmark for improving the learning process.

Therefore, continuous development in line with the applied curriculum is very important. The efforts made by the teacher in developing the student learning evaluation process involve discussions between teachers to find the best results. For the criteria of completeness based on the minimum threshold, at SMPLB Lumajang, it is determined by each subject teacher. For the subject of Islamic Education, the minimum score is 75. With this minimum threshold, to determine whether a student is performing well or not, the teacher sums up both academic and non-academic scores. The report card also includes a special section for achievements that the student has earned, with the goal of ensuring that students with disabilities feel the same as their peers and remain motivated to learn.

Student Development

Extracurricular activities are those that add value to students and can also contribute to the development of the institution itself. In today's world, there is increasing pressure from parents for their children to excel and to cultivate good and useful creativity. Extracurricular activities can also help raise the profile of a school, as they produce new generations of individuals who are experts in their respective fields. It is undeniable that extracurricular activities are often used as material for competitions at various levels, ranging from sub-district to national and even international events. The efforts of PAI (Islamic Religious Education) teachers to develop students' potential include joining several organizations in Lumajang, such as the Lumajang artists' community. This involvement helps students nurture their artistic talents. In addition, extracurricular activities related to religion at SMPLB Lumajang include Quran recitation. In these

activities, students are taught how to properly read the Arabic letters (Hijaiyyah) and follow the rules of Tajwid (pronunciation and phonetics of the Quran). This encourages students to develop a deeper love for the Quran and to respect the religion they follow. Furthermore, PAI teachers also engage with religious organizations that support the progress of extracurricular activities at SMPLB Lumajang.

The urgency of developing the pedagogical competence of PAI teachers to improve the learning outcomes of students with special needs at SMPLB Lumajang begins with their competency. Competence is something that every educator must have. Competence exists solely so that the duties of an educator can run well. One of the competencies that teachers must have is pedagogical competence. This pedagogical competency is a competency that in managing learning needs to receive more attention. This competence is very important, because many people think less of a teacher if the teacher does not highlight the competencies he or she has.

Regarding the teacher's ability to understand students, this does not only refer to understanding their outward behavior, but also understanding their character, personality, and identifying the students' initial learning background. What is meant by identifying the students' initial learning background is that the teacher should be able to assess how deep the initial potential of the students is, what differences in potential exist among the students, and so on.

When comparing the theory above with the results of interviews and observations conducted by the researcher, it was found that, in understanding students, the PAI teacher at SMPLB Lumajang uses a personal approach with each student. Why is an approach used? Because it makes it easier for the teacher to understand the students, as each class has different disabilities, and the approach to each of them differs as well. For example, with students who have speech or hearing impairments, the teacher must master sign language, as their way of communicating is different from other disabilities. Meanwhile, to determine the students' level of intelligence, the teacher observes their activity in the classroom and how they respond when receiving the learning material.

The teacher's role is not only to teach, but also to improve the character of students who are still deviating, which is why teachers are referred to as the second parent for their students. This is because, if we look closely, most of their time is spent on learning. Therefore, with these responsibilities, teachers certainly have many ways of handling their students. Not only inside the classroom but also outside of it, not only during lessons but also during other activities. One of the things they do is to understand the students' character, which aims to determine the best approach to instilling religious values in the students.

In designing learning, the indicators include applying learning theories, determining learning strategies, the competencies to be achieved, teaching materials, and preparing lesson plans. These lesson plans are integrated into one sequence, which is called the Lesson Plan Implementation. Essentially, the Lesson Plan Implementation is a teaching device prepared by the teacher as a guide in the learning process. If compared to this theory, based on the interviews and observations conducted by the researcher, it can be seen that the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMPLB Lumajang have made lesson plans before carrying out the lessons. These lesson plans are then reviewed by the

school principal and the curriculum supervisor. Therefore, the lesson plans prepared are not arbitrary or merely formalities in the learning process.

The importance of such a plan lies in its ability to assist teachers in carrying out their duties as educators. The numerous demands that need to be addressed require teachers to manage everything, including the lesson planning, efficiently.

The ability to implement learning has indicators such as organizing the learning environment and conducting lessons in a conducive manner. In the learning process, students cannot be expected to find the material on their own; instead, the teacher serves as a facilitator for the students, meaning the teacher is ready to guide students when they encounter difficulties in understanding a topic that has been explained. In the teaching and learning process, it is better if it is connected to existing realities, so that students can more easily understand the material being taught.

Compared to the theory above, based on the interviews and observations conducted by the researcher, it is found that the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMPLB implement the learning process in two ways: face-to-face and online learning, with one week dedicated to face-to-face sessions and the next week to online sessions. This is a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The learning process at SMPLB Lumajang is already categorized as good. This can be seen during the learning process, as students are able to respect and listen to what the teacher is explaining. PAI teachers at SMPLB Lumajang often use learning media to support the teaching and learning process in the classroom. Among the media used are educational dolls, videos, pictures, and general books that serve as references for the material.

Mrs. Kristin is a teacher with a lot of creativity, as observed by the researcher. The researcher found Mrs. Kristin painting in one of the rooms for an extracurricular activity. It is no surprise that Mrs. Kristin, in her teaching process, demonstrates good creativity to make her students enthusiastic about learning.

In the design and implementation of learning evaluations, the indicators include conducting evaluations using various methods, analyzing the assessment results to determine the level of mastery, and utilizing learning outcomes to improve the quality of the learning program. The evaluations carried out by the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMPLB Lumajang usually involve oral tests, written tests, and practical assessments. The oral test is typically conducted in the classroom using a question-and-answer format.

In the implementation of evaluations, SMPLB Lumajang sets the minimum mastery criteria based on the subject teacher's determination. The minimum passing grade for the Islamic Religious Education subject is set at 75.

The ability to develop students' potential has indicators such as facilitating students' development of both academic and non-academic potentials. The development of students' potential is an aspect of pedagogical competence, which every teacher should possess. This aims to utilize all the abilities within the teacher themselves. The development of students can be carried out by teachers in many ways. One of the approaches used at SMPLB Lumajang is religious extracurricular activities such as Quran reading (mengaji) and al-Banjari.

The al-Banjari extracurricular activity is usually attended by children with visual impairments, as most of the participants are from this group. Meanwhile, the Quran reading extracurricular activity is attended by students with various disabilities at SMPLB Lumajang. With such platforms, it is hoped that the students at SMPLB Lumajang will be able to develop their potentials, not only by receiving lessons in the classroom but also by continuing to explore their

potential, which they will later apply when they become part of society. This way, there will be no more cases of people with disabilities being victims of abuse or being looked down upon by the surrounding community.

Learning outcomes are the achievements attained by students, which include several criteria determined by the teacher. These outcomes are obtained through the processes of planning and implementing evaluations. Compared to the theory above, based on the interviews and observations conducted by the researcher, it can be concluded that in terms of learning outcomes at SMPLB Lumajang, evaluations are conducted using oral tests, written tests, and practical assessments. In assessing attitudes, a personal approach and observation are used.

The average scores achieved by the students have exceeded the minimum completeness criteria, although many students still meet only the minimum completeness criteria. According to Mrs. Kristin, most of those who are at the minimum completeness criteria level are students with intellectual disabilities. These students have cognitive impairments, so teachers need to have effective strategies and methods in teaching to better help them understand the learning process.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data and analysis presented, it can be concluded that in understanding students, the strategy implemented by the teacher is through participation in the PAI Teacher Working Group (KKG). In this activity, PAI teachers can exchange ideas with other PAI teachers. In designing learning, the effort made by the PAI teacher is to attend curriculum workshops, which aim to make the planning process more directed and systematic. Furthermore, the development of learning is also carried out by participating in KKG, similar to the effort of understanding students. In KKG, teachers can share issues related to the implementation of learning, such as teaching methods or strategies. Additionally, the teacher designs and implements evaluations through discussions with fellow teachers who have attended training or workshops. The development of students is supported by participating in several Islamic organizations in Lumajang and joining the Lumajang artist community, which helps students explore their potential in the field of art.

The urgency of developing teachers' pedagogical competencies is done by approaching students personally. This allows the teacher to easily understand the character of each student, create lesson plans that are first reviewed by the principal and curriculum supervisor, and implement learning through both face-to-face and online methods. Teachers usually use learning media such as educational dolls, pictures, videos, and others to support classroom learning. Teaching methods such as lectures and personalized approaches to each student are also used. Furthermore, it is important that the design and implementation of evaluations are conducted through oral tests, written tests, and practical assessments. Student development is supported by extracurricular activities such as Quran reading (mengaji) and al-Banjari. Learning outcomes are obtained through oral tests, written tests, and practical assessments, while attitude assessments are obtained through personal approaches and observations.

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