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## Professional competence of teachers in improving the quality of learning

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### Abstract

This study sought to examine the implementation of teachers' professional competence in classroom practices and its impact on the quality of education. The research employed qualitative and quantitative approaches. The subjects comprised eight teachers, three senior Islamic instructors, and 25 students at the Islamic junior high school [MTs] level. Data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and student questionnaires. The results revealed three key findings. First, there was a strong synergy between professional skills and Islamic principles, with teachers mastering content and pedagogy and embedding adab (ethics) and *akhlak* (morals) in their teaching. Second, institutional strategies such as regular training, performance evaluation, and academic culture development effectively enhanced teacher professionalism. Third, teachers' professional competence significantly affected the quality of education, as reflected in improved student understanding, motivation, and engagement. It was concluded that improving the quality of education at *MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab* was strongly influenced by teachers' professional competence, supported by Islamic values and well-structured institutional systems.

### Keywords

Competence, learning quality, MTs, professional teachers

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## Introduction

The progress of civilization and the development of a country are highly dependent on a solid educational foundation. Amid globalization's dynamics and digital technology's transformation today, educational quality standards are a fundamental parameter for producing a generation with intellectual intelligence and excellence in moral and spiritual aspects. A vital component of the educational structure is the presence of professionally competent educators, especially in contemporary Islamic boarding schools, which align religious learning with general knowledge through a comprehensive approach (Susanti et al., 2024).

Contemporary boarding institutions such as MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab require educators who can demonstrate comprehensive expertise, including mastery of learning content, pedagogical insight, classroom management proficiency, self-reflection capacity, and maintenance of high moral and spiritual standards (Nasution, 2023). Expectations for professional educators include actualizing their role as guides, motivators, and sources of inspiration in education dynamics, thus creating a dynamic, innovative, productive, and enjoyable learning atmosphere (Anggraini et al., 2023).

Islamic education places educators in a respected and strategically vital position. Their function goes beyond mere knowledge delivery; they also play a role in developing the morality and identity of learners. However, contemporary dynamics marked by the technological revolution, complex student demands, and increasingly high expectations of educational quality require educators to continue to develop their professional capacity (Petrychenko et al., 2025).

Previous studies have revealed that the professional expertise of educators in Islamic boarding schools significantly impacts the quality of the educational process, especially if supported by effective administrative management, capacity building programs, and ongoing guidance (Iqbal, 2019). For contemporary boarding schools, approaches such as academic supervision, learning tool design, weekly routine assessments, and guidance rooted in Islamic principles have become key instruments in optimizing teaching standards (Anggraini et al., 2023).

## Literature Review

### *Professional capacity of teaching staff in the dynamics of education*

Based on the findings from field observations, it is apparent that the teaching staff at MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab have succeeded in integrating various professional skills that align with national education standards. This is reflected in the learning delivery strategy that focuses on the cognitive aspect and includes the affective and psychomotor dimensions in a balanced manner. The in-depth study of the material presented shows comprehensive mastery in general subjects such as mathematics and English, as well as Islamic sciences such as *tafsir* and *fiqh*. The teachers can deliver the material through interactive methods such as questions and

answers, group discussions, and role simulations, making the learning process livelier and more meaningful.

The Learning Implementation Plan device shows a strong synergy between the national curriculum and Islamic values. For instance, in natural science education, teaching the human respiratory system extends beyond a purely biological perspective. However, it also links to spiritual values, including gratitude to Allah for the blessings of life and health. This approach reflects the application of the integrative-holistic method characteristic of modern Islamic boarding school education (Majid et al., 2025 & Mardhatillah et al., 2022).

According to the results of interviews with students, it was revealed that teachers who are considered professionals can create a dynamic and enjoyable learning atmosphere, provide open discussion spaces, and encourage students to think critically and analytically about social issues from an Islamic perspective. This finding aligns with the views of Syuaibah et al. (2020), who stated that educators in Islamic boarding schools must be able to integrate formal and informal curricula and instill moral values in the learning process. In addition, students also expressed high appreciation for teachers who have a "nurturing" or guiding character outside of class hours. This type of teacher is considered a second-parent figure who creates a strong pedagogical relationship and fosters student discipline and responsibility (Anggraini et al., 2023). Several important strategies need to be implemented to support the sustainability of the quality of teaching staff in Islamic boarding schools. First, standardization of professional standards for education by statutory provisions is essential, so that educators have complete responsibility for their duties and consequences. Second, the development of a teacher professionalism system needs to be carried out in an integrated manner to strengthen each other and improve competence. Third, the management of teaching staff must be adjusted to teach the educational institution's characteristics and uniqueness so that teachers' role as education implementers can be carried out optimally (Afrizen et al., 2021).

### *Approach to improving educator competence*

The results of in-depth dialogue with the leadership and academic staff at the MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab revealed that this institution has implemented a series of initiatives to develop educator competency through a systematic and tiered approach. This strategy aims to improve the technical abilities of teachers and strengthen the Islamic character and spiritual values that are the primary foundation of Islamic boarding school education.

One of the main approaches implemented is internal supervision and assessment based on Islamic principles. The leaders of Islamic boarding schools routinely carry out teacher performance evaluations through direct observation of the learning process, examination of administrative documents, and in-depth interpersonal dialogue. This evaluation focuses on pedagogical aspects and assesses moral integrity, sincerity in educating, and teacher involvement in the life of the Islamic boarding school. As stated by Harly et al. (2025) and Iqbal (2019), a supervision model prioritizing spirituality has a more profound impact because it touches on aspects of professional ethics.

In addition, developing digital competence and creativity in instructional media is important for improving teacher professionalism. Educators are encouraged to master educational technology through training that includes creating educational video content,

Islamic infographic design, and using interactive platforms such as Quizizz and Nearpod. Some teachers even develop personal blogs containing learning reflections, innovative teaching tools, and video lectures that students can access independently. This practice aligns with the findings of [Junita et al. \(2023\)](#), which stated that combining teacher innovation and student-centered learning approaches results in more effective and meaningful learning experiences.

Furthermore, MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab also holds a weekly Educator Discussion Assembly. This forum is a collaborative space for educators to review the effectiveness of learning, identify obstacles in the classroom, and design improvement strategies. In this assembly, a lesson study process strengthens professional solidarity and becomes a medium for exchanging experiences between teachers. [Kharismawati \(2019\)](#) and [Syuaibah et al. \(2020\)](#) emphasized that this kind of practice can build a reflective culture and continuously improve the quality of teaching.

No less important, strengthening the spiritual dimension also receives attention through a program of studying classical books carried out every Friday night. This activity aims to maintain the spirit of preaching and form a sincere intention in carrying out the education mandate. Teachers who are active in spiritual development tend to be patient, loving, and humble when facing dynamics. This assumption is supported by the findings of [Anggraini et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Sapada et al. \(2023\)](#), which stated that the spiritual strength of educators significantly contributes to creating a meaningful and worshipful learning environment.

### ***The influence of the educator's professional expertise on the quality of the learning process***

The professional expertise of educators developed through systematic and tiered approaches at MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab has had a real impact on improving the quality of the learning process. Based on the results of field observations, it appears that the transformation of educator competence has resulted in several important achievements that reflect the success of the integration between professionalism and Islamic values in educational practices. First, there is a significant increase in active student engagement during the learning process. Teachers facilitating open dialogue, encouraging case analysis, and successfully simulating real-life situations create a dynamic and participatory learning atmosphere. The positive response from students to this approach shows the success of contextual and relevant pedagogical strategies ([Susanti et al., 2024](#)).

Second, the learning process supervised by professional educators also has an impact on strengthening students' discipline and sense of responsibility. Observations indicate that students attend punctually, dress neatly according to uniform rules, and bring complete learning equipment. This condition reflects the internalization of the values of discipline and responsibility instilled through the example of teachers in their daily lives ([Syuaibah et al., 2020](#)). Third, students' academic achievement has also increased significantly. Teachers actively revise and refine the lesson plan based on individual reflection results and collective input from the Educator Discussion Council forum. This revision results in a learning process that is more responsive to students' needs and more measurable in achieving learning outcomes ([Mardhatillah et al., 2022](#); [Nasution, 2023](#)). Fourth, forming an Islamic and humanist

learning atmosphere is a noteworthy achievement. The learning environment is physically conducive and full of emotional and spiritual support. Educators provide a learning space that encourages a sense of security, compassion, and sensitivity to moral values, ultimately contributing to the formation of students' character and strengthening their emotional ties to the educational process (Falah et al., 2025).

## **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to provide an in-depth description of the professional competencies of educators at MT Pesantren Ulul Albab, along with the institutional strategies implemented to improve the quality of the learning process. This approach was chosen because it provides a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon studied by exploring factual field data, contextual analysis, and interpretation that links the findings to relevant theoretical frameworks. The research was conducted at MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab, located in Koto Baru, Dharmasraya, West Sumatra. This Islamic boarding school was purposively selected due to its unique characteristics: integrating the general curriculum with the Islamic religious curriculum and strongly instilling Islamic values in the learning process. The study period lasted three months, from January to March 2025, encompassing preparation, data collection, analysis, and validation of the results.

The research subjects included all parties directly involved in the educational process at MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab. The key informants consisted of educators (eight general subject teachers and three senior ustadz) representing various academic fields, students (twenty-five students) representing grades VII, VIII, and IX, and the management team of the Islamic boarding school, including the principal and curriculum administrators. All the informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, considering that these parties have experience, knowledge, and direct involvement in the phenomenon under study.

In collecting the data, the researchers conducted three main techniques including (1) in-depth interviews in which researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers, religious teachers, students, and management. The interview guide included questions about teachers' understanding and practice of professional competency, institutional strategies, and students' perceptions of learning quality. Interviews were recorded (with the respondents' consent) and transcribed for analysis, (2) participant observation, the researchers observed classroom learning processes, teacher-student interactions, media use, evaluation strategies, and teacher involvement in non-academic activities at the Islamic boarding school. Observations were conducted using a guide sheet containing professional competency indicators, (3) documents, this included reviewing Lesson Implementation Plan (RPP) documents, teacher evaluation reports, student learning outcome records, teacher training schedules, and documentation of the Islamic boarding school's academic and religious activities.

## **Findings and Discussion**

This analysis described the findings through their relationship with educational concepts and previous research results to strengthen academic arguments about the role of professional

educators in improving the quality of learning in modern Islamic boarding school environments.

***Synergy of professional expertise with Islamic principles in the learning process***

This study aimed to reveal how the synergy between the professional expertise of educators and Islamic principles supports the effectiveness of learning at MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab. Data were collected from 8 teachers, three senior ustadz, and 25 students through interviews, observations, and documentation.

**Table 1.** *Integration of professional expertise with Islamic values*

Components	Indicators of professionalism	Implementation of Islamic principles	Synergy level*
Learning planning	Formulation of objectives, media, lesson plans	Sincere intention, relevance to morals	Very high
Implementation of learning	Mastery of material, active strategy	Teacher-student habituation of prayer etiquette,	High
Assessment of learning	Formative-summative evaluation	Trust the assessment, be honest	High
Teacher's exemplary behavior	Consistency in method and attitude	Good manners, noble morals	Very high
Self-development	Mgmp activities, training	Persistence in seeking knowledge	High enough

\*The level of synergy is measured based on the intensity, consistency, and depth of integration of professional and Islamic values from the results of observations and interviews.

The study results indicate that the MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab teachers have adequate professional competence in mastery of material, active learning strategies, and evaluation skills. This is synergized with Islamic values such as sincerity, exemplary behavior, and honesty. For example, in the learning planning stage, teachers prepare lesson plans and media and ensure that learning objectives reflect noble moral values and are relevant to the students' lives.

In implementing learning, the ustadz integrates lecture methods, discussions, and direct practice with Islamic manners and ethics. Teachers begin lessons with prayers and greetings and always emphasize the importance of manners towards knowledge and teachers. This approach is agreed upon by 84% of students who stated that learning in Islamic boarding schools increases knowledge and forms their Islamic character. The teachers apply fair and honest principles according to Islamic values in the assessment aspect. The assessment process is carried out transparently, and the results reflect the cognitive aspects of students and the affective and spiritual aspects. Teachers' exemplary behavior is an important pillar. Teachers deliver material and become excellent examples in everyday life. Teachers arrive on time, dress neatly, and use polite language. Such behavior impacts on the character of students who respect teachers and love knowledge.

However, regarding self-development, it was found that not all teachers actively participated in training outside the *pesantren*. Although they consistently recite the Koran and attend internal *halaqah*, participation in external forums is still limited. This challenge involves developing professionalism that adapts to modern technology and pedagogical advancements.

This condition confirms the view of Agusnani et al. (2025), who stated that professional educators must be able to harmonize pedagogical competence with students' cultural and spiritual context. The synergy between professional expertise and Islamic principles has proven to be a significant strength in the MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab education system. This integrative concept is based on the theory of Islamic integral education, which emphasizes the unification of spiritual and intellectual aspects. This study strengthens the theory that teachers are academically competent and must be role models in morals and daily life. Amin et al. (2020) emphasized that educators in modern Islamic boarding schools can no longer rely on a monolithic approach. However, they must be able to adapt dynamically to the demands of the times without sacrificing the fundamental values of the Islamic boarding school. Professionalism and Islamic ethos provide holistic learning, making students intelligent and moral. This aligns with Islamic education's goal: to form *insan kamil* - a complete human being who knows, can, and is willing to do what is right.

### *Institutional approaches to developing educator professionalism*

MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab implements a systemic approach through internal supervision based on Islamic principles, digital media development programs, educator discussion councils, and ongoing book studies. This study aims to determine how the institutional approach implemented by MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab can develop the professionalism of educators (teachers and ustadz) and how students perceive its impact on learning. Data were collected through interviews with eleven educators (eight teachers and three senior ustadz), distributing questionnaires to 25 MTs students, and observing learning activities and Islamic boarding school institutions.

**Table 2.** *Components of the institutional approach and their impact on educator professionalism*

<b>Institutional components</b>	<b>Implementation strategy</b>	<b>Teacher &amp; ustadz response (n=11)</b>	<b>Perception of MTs students (n=25)</b>	<b>Level of effectiveness</b>
Continuous training	Methodology workshop, Diniyah curriculum integration training	Nine actively participating, two passives	Twenty students stated that learning was more varied	High
Periodic performance evaluation	Class observation, assessment by the head of the madrasah	Seven feel nurtured, four still feel it is a formality	Eighteen students feel the teacher is more structured	Medium-high
Strengthening academic culture	Routine book study, weekly scholarly forum	Ten active, one passive	Twenty-three students participated and felt the benefits	Very high
Exemplary behavior and good examples	Strengthening teacher morals and ethics	Eleven provides examples of Islamic attitudes	Twenty-four stated that teachers are role models	Very high
Facilitation and policy	Incentive allowances, study leave policies	Six feel sufficient, five are still limited	Fifteen students do not know yet	Enough

The study results indicate that MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab has implemented a systematic and gradual institutional approach to improving the professionalism of educators, especially teachers and ustadz, at the MTs level. This approach is carried out through five main aspects:

ongoing training, performance evaluation, strengthening academic culture, teacher role models, and institutional policies.

First, in terms of ongoing training, the Islamic boarding school routinely holds training on modern learning methods combined with Islamic values. Of the 11 educators, nine actively participated in the training and felt the benefits, especially regarding variations in learning strategies and curriculum planning. This aligns with the opinions of 20 students, who stated that since the last two semesters, teachers have used more discussion, practice, and project methods. Second, through periodic performance evaluations, teachers can receive constructive input from the principal. Although four teachers stated that the evaluation felt administrative, seven others felt it helped them improve their teaching patterns. 18 out of 25 students felt an increase in the regularity and structure of the teacher's material delivery.

Third, strengthening academic culture is one of the strengths of this institution. Activities such as weekly book studies and internal scientific discussions increase the intellectual capacity of educators and provide real examples of the spirit of learning to students. Ten out of 11 educators actively participated in these activities, and 23 students stated they were involved and motivated.

Fourth, the aspect of teacher role models shows very significant results. All teachers and ustadz appear as role models in worship, being polite, and enforcing discipline. Twenty-four students said that their teachers are role models in morals and discipline. Finally, regarding HR facilitation and policies, it was found that only six teachers felt that the facilities and incentives were adequate. In contrast, five others felt that improvements were needed, especially in access to digital literature and external training. On the santri side, the majority did not know this institutional support in detail, even though they felt the results.

Based on the data collected, the institutional approach at MT's Pesantren Ulul Albab has positively impacted the development of educator professionalism. However, not all aspects of the institutional approach have been implemented optimally. This approach aligns with the theory of institutional-based teacher professionalism, which states that established structures and systems must support teacher development.

Training strategies, evaluations, and academic culture are the main factors in shaping the quality of educators. Meanwhile, role models are a unique strength of Islamic boarding schools that general educational institutions do not possess. This strengthens the integrated Islamic character education model that combines cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects simultaneously.

However, support for facilities and incentive policies still needs to be improved so that educators are more enthusiastic and appreciate their contributions. In addition, teacher involvement in policy formulation is also important to encourage a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. This series of initiatives represents a comprehensive and collaborative philosophy of educational management. This philosophy corresponds to the concept of continuous quality improvement management in education, which prioritizes the significance of evaluation, reflection, and joint coaching to optimize the professionalism of educators (Falah et al., 2025).

In addition, the spirituality-based supervision approach has unique characteristics in the context of Islamic boarding schools. Rather than merely measuring administrative and technical dimensions, this approach reaches out to educators' ethical and moral aspects, as

described by Muzakki (2022), who stated that Islamic education must strengthen moral capital as a foundation for professionalism.

*The influence of professional educator skills on improving the quality of the educational process*

The comprehensive application of professional expertise provides real results in increased student participation, discipline levels, learning achievements, and the formation of a positive learning atmosphere. This study shows that teacher expertise influences learning outcomes in terms of knowledge and helps shape students' character and morals.

**Table 3.** *Dimensions of professional ability and their impact on the quality of education*

Dimensions of professionalism	Key indicators	Teacher/Ustadz Response (N=11)	Student Response (N=25)	Observed Impact
Mastery of teaching materials	Depth and understanding of concepts	Nine are master, two are sufficient	Twenty-two students understand the material	High
Pedagogical competence	Variation in methods and class management	Eight are active, varied, and three are monotonous	Nineteen students feel happy	High enough
Use of learning media	Assistive, digital, or contextual tools	Six are creative, five are limited	Seventeen students felt helped	Medium-High
Evaluation techniques	Fair process and outcome assessment	Ten are objectives, one is not yet optimal	Twenty-three students feel they are being judged honestly	High
Communication activity	Two-way interaction, providing motivation	Seven are active, four tend to be formal	Twenty students feel cared for	High enough

The study results indicated that professional abilities greatly influence the quality of the educational process, both in terms of material delivery, learning atmosphere, and evaluation effectiveness. In the dimension of mastery of teaching materials, 9 out of 11 educators demonstrate excellent mastery of the subject matter. They can explain religious, scientific, and social concepts in depth and contextually. This proficiency is reflected in the responses of 22 students who stated that they found it easier to understand the lesson because the teacher explained it coherently and efficiently.

Regarding pedagogical competence, most teachers have implemented various learning methods, such as group discussions, question and answer, and direct practice. Eight educators consistently managed the class actively, while three others continued to use the traditional lecture pattern. Consequently, 19 students expressed happiness and active participation, while some expressed boredom when the methods lacked variety. Regarding learning media, only six teachers consistently use aids such as pictures, short videos, or props, while five others rely on the blackboard and textbooks. However, 17 students felt helped by the illustrations or media, especially in the exact sciences and jurisprudence.

In evaluation techniques, most teachers (10 out of 11) carried out assessments objectively and fairly. Evaluation was carried out through daily tests, practical assignments, and portfolios. The impact was felt directly by 23 students, who claim that their grades reflect effort and understanding, not memorization or personal affinity. As for the aspect of communication and interaction, seven teachers demonstrated active two-way communication and motivation while studying. However, students considered four other teachers formal and rigid, thus providing little space for discussion or open questions. However, 20 out of 25 students still feel personally cared for by teachers, especially when they experience learning difficulties.

This finding strengthens the opinion that the professional ability of educators is a key factor in the success of the educational process. This aligns with the theory of professional teacher competency, which includes mastery of material, pedagogy, social skills, and personality (Law No. 14 of 2005). Islamic values enhance professionalism in the *pesantren* environment, particularly in teaching ethics, justice, and sincerity.

The most visible impact is increased quality of teacher-student interaction, increased understanding of concepts, and higher learning motivation. Students become more active in asking questions, discussing, and completing assignments independently. This study proves professional educators can create a conducive and meaningful learning climate. However, there are still some challenges. Some teachers have not maximized the use of innovative learning media; not all can create dialogic learning interactions. Therefore, regular training, pedagogical assistance, and providing creative space for teachers are needed to maximize their potential.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations/Implications**

The results of the study indicate that educators' professional abilities, including mastery of materials, pedagogical skills, use of media, evaluation techniques, and effective communication, significantly influence the quality of the educational process at MTs Pesantren Ulul Albab. Teachers and ustadz with high competence can create an active, enjoyable, and meaningful learning atmosphere for students.

Although some educators still face challenges in the variation of methods and utilization of learning media, their professionalism has formed positive interactions, increased students' understanding, and created a fair and objective evaluation system. This proves that continuous improvement of educators' professional abilities is significant in supporting the success of education in the *pesantren* environment.

### **Disclosure statement**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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