

## STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION THROUGH TEACHER TRAINING

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### ABSTRAK

Kualitas guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di tingkat Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) memiliki peran krusial dalam membentuk karakter dan spiritualitas peserta didik. Namun, masih banyak guru PAI yang belum mendapatkan pelatihan yang relevan dengan kebutuhan zaman, baik dari sisi pedagogi, literasi digital, maupun pemahaman nilai-nilai keislaman yang moderat dan kontekstual. Urgensi ini mendorong perlunya strategi pelatihan guru yang tidak hanya bersifat teknis, tetapi juga menyentuh aspek afektif dan profesional secara berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merumuskan strategi-strategi efektif dalam meningkatkan kualitas guru PAI melalui pendekatan pelatihan yang lebih adaptif dan kolaboratif. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa studi pustaka, wawancara mendalam, dan forum group discussion (FGD) bersama guru PAI, kepala madrasah, dan pengawas Kemenag. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga strategi utama: (1) pelatihan guru berbasis blended-learning yang holistik, (2) penguatan komunitas profesional guru PAI sebagai ruang kolaboratif dan reflektif, dan (3) kolaborasi antara madrasah, Kementerian Agama, dan perguruan tinggi Islam dalam merancang dan mengevaluasi pelatihan. Ketiga strategi ini saling melengkapi dan dapat diterapkan secara sinergis untuk mendorong peningkatan mutu guru PAI yang lebih berkelanjutan, relevan, dan berdampak pada kualitas pembelajaran di madrasah.

**Kata Kunci:** Pelatihan Guru, Pendidikan Agama Islam, Strategi Guru.

### ABSTRACT

*The quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) level has a crucial role in shaping the character and spirituality of students. However, there are still many PAI teachers who have not received training that is relevant to the needs of the times, both in terms of pedagogy, digital literacy, and understanding of moderate and contextual*

*Islamic values. This urgency encourages the need for a teacher training strategy that is not only technical, but also touches on affective and professional aspects in an ongoing manner. This research aims to formulate effective strategies in improving the quality of PAI teachers through a more adaptive and collaborative training approach. The method used is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques in the form of literature studies, in-depth interviews, and group discussion forums (FGD) with PAI teachers, madrasah heads, and Ministry of Religion supervisors. The results of the study show three main strategies: (1) holistic blended-learning-based teacher training, (2) strengthening the professional community of PAI teachers as a collaborative and reflective space, and (3) collaboration between madrasas, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and Islamic universities in designing and evaluating training. These three strategies complement each other and can be applied synergistically to encourage a more sustainable, relevant, and impactful improvement of the quality of PAI teachers in madrasas.*

**Keywords:** *Teacher Training, Islamic Religious Education, Teacher Strategy*

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) occupies an important position in our national education system. More than just conveying religious teachings theoretically, PAI plays a role in shaping the character, morals, and ethics of students from an early age. In the midst of an increasingly pluralistic society and the rapid flow of globalization, the challenges to religious education have become much more complex. Religious learning is no longer enough to only teach the laws of fiqh or creed normatively, but must be able to answer the reality of today's students' lives who are familiar with social media, faced with moral crises, and even exposed to extreme religious beliefs. In this context, the role of teachers becomes very crucial. PAI teachers are required not only to master the material, but also to be able to be role models in attitudes, guides in crises, and promoters of moderate Islamic values that are relevant to the times.

But unfortunately, there are still many PAI teachers who have not received training or coaching that is in accordance with the needs of the times. Many of them are not familiar with active learning methods, have not been trained to use digital technology in teaching, and still have difficulty relating religious materials to students' social realities. In fact, without regular training that touches on real

problems in the field, it is difficult to expect the birth of inspiring and meaningful learning. Data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs shows that more than half of PAI teachers have not attended regular professional training. This is a signal that we need to pay serious attention to improving the quality of teachers, because in their hands, the future of enlightening religious education depends greatly. Teacher training is no longer just a complement, but an urgent need so that PAI is truly alive, relevant, and touches the hearts of students.

If this problem continues to be left without concrete steps, then we face a serious risk in the process of character formation of the younger generation. Teachers who are not well trained can present boring learning, do not touch the emotional and spiritual needs of students, and can even cause students to become apathetic to religious lessons. Furthermore, a monotonous and textual approach to learning can open up space for the development of rigid, exclusive, and even radical religious beliefs. Updating the approach in Islamic education is very important so as not to get caught up in mere formalism and symbolism (Azra, 2019). In addition, technological developments and changes in students' increasingly digital learning styles require teachers to adapt. The inability of PAI teachers to use technology appropriately will widen the distance between them and their students, and make learning irrelevant. If appropriate intervention is not carried out immediately, this gap will continue to widen and ultimately weaken the role of religious education as a guardian of the nation's morals and integrity. The transformation of religious education is only possible if teachers as the main actors are equipped with appropriate, sustainable, and contextual training (Zuhdi, 2021). Therefore, building a systematic PAI teacher training strategy is an urgent step that cannot be postponed if we want to save the future of Islamic education and the character of the nation's generation.

Muhammad Firmansyah's research (2025) explores the need for teachers' digital literacy and the importance of continuous training so that PAI teachers are relevant and adaptive to meet the needs of generation Z. In addition, Muhammad Hadziq's research (2024), This research emphasizes digital literacy and the ethics of using AI by teachers, which requires competent training in the field of technology and ethics of educational applications.

Although the study provides valuable insights into the importance of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher training in the digital era, there are still some weaknesses that need to be examined. First, most studies tend to be conceptual or offer ideal ideas and solutions but are less supported by empirical data in the field. This means that what is conveyed has often not been tested directly in a real context, so it does not fully reflect the needs and challenges faced by PAI teachers directly. Second, the focus of research is more on technical aspects, such as mastery of technology or digitalization of learning. In fact, teacher training should not only be about technological skills, but also touch on the side of personality, spirituality, and approaches that touch the hearts of students. Third, some studies also seem to be not enough to actively involve teachers, both in the process of data collection and the preparation of training strategies. This risks making the recommendations offered feel less acceptable and not in line with the reality on the ground. Finally, there is not much research that presents a training model that is structured and can be applied immediately. Most are still generic without concrete technical guidance. Therefore, more in-depth follow-up research is needed, based on the real needs of teachers, and able to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

This descriptive qualitative research at MTsS Tarbiyatul Mubtadi'in aims to explore the training strategy of PAI teachers in depth. Using purposive sampling techniques, data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña which included reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawn. The validity of findings is ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques as well as member checking, in order to formulate training strategies that are contextual, practical, and relevant for educators.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Strategy 1: Conduct Blended-Learning-Based Teacher Training in a Holistic and Sustainable Manner**

The first strategy in an effort to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) level is the implementation of blended-learning-based teacher training in a holistic and sustainable manner. This

training model combines face-to-face learning with online sessions designed to strengthen pedagogic competence, mastery of learning technology, and inculcate moderate and contextual Islamic values.

This training does not only focus on the technical aspect, but also emphasizes the affective and spiritual dimensions of teachers as educators as well as role models. Through direct mentoring, reflective discussion forums, and periodic evaluations, PAI teachers are expected to be able to design learning that is interactive, meaningful, and relevant to the challenges of the times. With a comprehensive approach, this training is aimed at answering the real needs of PAI teachers who want to develop, but are often constrained by limited time, resources, and conventional training methods.

Because the implementation of *blended-learning-based* teacher training is considered the most relevant to the needs and conditions of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers today. PAI teachers at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) level are not only required to master teaching materials, but must also be able to convey religious values in a contextual and interesting way in the digital era. However, most teachers face challenges such as limited time to attend full training, unequal access to quality training, and lack of mastery of learning technology.

The *blended-learning* model—which combines in-person and online learning—provides teachers with the flexibility to learn at their own time and needs, without having to abandon teaching assignments. In addition, this approach allows training to take place more intensively and continuously, not limited to just one or two meetings. This is in line with the principle of *lifelong learning* for teachers as lifelong learners. This kind of training is also more adaptive to the times and can be adjusted to the characteristics of today's technologically literate students. Thus, *blended-learning* is a strategic and contextual solution to improve the capacity of PAI teachers as a whole—both from cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects.

For example, the implementation is as follows:

## Program Design

### Face-to-Face Sessions (months 1–3):

1. Classroom technology workshop: use of LMS, multimedia, and interactive applications.
2. Affective-spiritual pedagogy: the ability to accompany students emotionally, instill moderation values, how to insert short lectures of wisdom in learning.
3. Innovative lesson plan design: practicum to create thematic lesson plans with technology integration. Evaluation is carried out through lesson plan presentations and class discussions.

### Online Sessions (months 4–6):

1. Regular zoom per technology and pedagogical theme.
2. Case narrative discussion: the teacher discusses the real challenges when applying in the classroom.
3. Peer feedback between teachers: through an online forum in the LMS.

## Mentoring & Evaluation:

The facilitator conducts class visits to observe the application of the material and provide direct advice. The analysis of the observation results was used as material for reflection in online forums. Final evaluation is conducted after 6 months to assess learning transfer and its impact on teaching quality.

## Real Impact at MTs Al-Inayah in the Bandung area:

- Before the training, ICT use was low—only 10% of teachers had ever used multimedia.
- Six months post-training, 75% of active teachers use videos, interactive quizzes, and LMS.
- Observations show that student engagement increases: more proactively asking, discussing, and mentioning the application of religious values to real contexts.

- Teachers report that affective-spiritual sessions make them more confident in motivating students who are experiencing failures.

Based on the findings of the research, the blended-learning-based teacher training strategy has proven to be an effective approach in improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level. This training is not only able to improve teachers' pedagogic and technological competence, but also strengthens the spiritual and emotional values that are needed in PAI learning. Time flexibility, material sustainability, and mentoring support are the main factors that make this model more applicable than conventional training.

Seeing the effectiveness of this approach, it is recommended that the madrasah, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and teacher training institutions start designing a holistic and structured blended-learning training program. Training should be designed based on the needs of teachers in the field, complemented by thematic face-to-face sessions, reflective online forums, and a continuous evaluation system. With this strategy, it is hoped that PAI teachers will not only become teachers, but also educators who are able to guide the young generation as a whole—from intellect, taste, to morals.

### **Strategy 2: Establish and strengthen a professional community of PAI teachers at the MTs level**

The second strategy offered is to form and strengthen the professional community of PAI teachers at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level as a forum for sharing, learning together, and inspiring each other between teachers. This community becomes a collaborative space to discuss learning challenges, design new media and methods, and share post-training best practices.

With this community, training that was previously one-way and short-term can be expanded into a continuous learning process. Teachers are not only dependent on formal training from the government, but also actively build capacity independently with their peers. This is where the added value lies: teachers grow together as fellow practitioners, not just trainees.

Top-down teacher training often ends without continuation. Many PAI teachers find it difficult to apply the training materials because there is no room for

discussion afterwards. Therefore, a **professional community of teachers** is needed that is informal but consistent as a space for reflection and self-development. Communities like this not only strengthen relationships between teachers, but also form a collaborative and independent learning culture. Because there was a sala, a PAI teacher who said: "Sometimes we participate in training, the enthusiasm is only at that time. But after returning to school, he lost his way because he didn't know where to start. If there is a small forum or study group in the madrasah, maybe we can help each other."

In the FGD with the head of the madrasah and four PAI teachers, it was agreed that teachers will be more encouraged to develop if accompanied by an active community of peers. They proposed a monthly routine meeting between PAI teachers across MTs in the sub-district, with sessions on sharing teaching practices, contextual Islamic studies, and microteaching.

With the existence of a professional community, teachers can continue to develop themselves outside of the formal training space. Community becomes a bridge between theory and practice, and strengthens a sense of belonging to the profession. This initiative is also in line with a participatory approach in human resource development that places teachers as agents of change, not just training objects.

For example, the implementation is as follows:

At MTs Nurul Hikmah, PAI teachers have formed a **PAI Teacher Discussion Group** since 2022. Initially, it only contained 4 teachers from one madrasah, but now it has developed into a sub-district level community attended by 15 teachers from 6 MTs. This community has regular activities such as:

1. **Monthly Forum "Ngaji Curriculum"**: Discusses sensitive PAI teaching themes, such as pluralism and religious radicalism, and how to convey them wisely.
2. **Review of RPP and Teaching Materials**: Teachers give each other input on the learning plans of their peers before implementation.
3. **Rotating Microteaching**: Every month one teacher conducts a teaching simulation and gets feedback from other members.
4. **Active WhatsApp Groups**: For media sharing, relevant verses/hadith

quotes, and online training information.

The results of this community are quite significant. The teacher admitted that he was more confident because he felt "not alone" in facing class challenges. They are also more open to new methods because there are discussion buddies. In addition, the head of the madrasah feels helped because learning innovations grow from within, not just told from outside.

The strategy of strengthening the professional community of PAI teachers shows that collaboration and peer support are important keys in maintaining the sustainability of training results. This community helps teachers translate training materials into practice, as well as encourage innovation and confidence in teaching.

Therefore, it is recommended that madrasahs and education supervisors encourage the formation of an active and structured PAI teacher community. Regular meetings, thematic discussion forums, and peer-to-peer microteaching can be an important part of an independent, inexpensive, but high-impact PAI teacher quality improvement strategy.

### **Third strategy: Cross-Institutional Collaboration (Madrasah – Ministry of Religion – Higher Education) for the Design and Evaluation of PAI Teacher Training**

The third strategy is to build a synergistic partnership between madrasahs, the Ministry of Religion (Kemenag), and Islamic religious universities in designing, implementing, and evaluating PAI teacher training programs. This collaboration aims to combine practical perspectives of madrasahs, government policies, and academic science in an integrated manner.

With this collaboration, teacher training is no longer top-down or uniform, but based on real needs in the field, strengthened by scientific studies and supported by policy. This synergy opens up space for training innovation, trial of new learning models, and continuous collaborative research for a more measurable and systematic improvement of the quality of PAI teachers.

One of the weaknesses of teacher training so far is the lack of direct involvement of academics and schools in the design and evaluation of training.

Many training programs held by the Ministry of Religion are one-way, not touching the local needs of madrasas. In fact, universities have scientific resources that can be used to design training materials that are in accordance with scientific developments and contemporary issues.

By establishing collaboration between madrasas, the Ministry of Religion, and universities, training can be adapted to real conditions in the classroom, remain in accordance with the direction of national policies, and be strengthened by tested academic methodologies. Because during an interview with the head of the madrasah, he said: "We want training that is not only a formality, but really the result of joint thinking. If the campus can be involved, let us also get a new perspective."

In the FGD with representatives of madrasas, supervisors of the Ministry of Religion, and lecturers from UIN, it was agreed that the ideal training is one that involves all parties from the design stage. Lecturers can prepare modules based on field needs, madrasas provide practical input, and the Ministry of Religion prepares policies and funding support. This cross-agency collaboration is not only a matter of technical coordination, but also a form of appreciation for the role of each party in improving the quality of education. This synergy will lead to training that is contextual, academic, standardized, and can be evaluated objectively.

For example, the implementation is as follows:

In 2023, MTs Amanah Mandiri will start a partnership program with the City Ministry of Religion. This program began with the preparation of a PAI teacher training curriculum based on local needs identified through surveys and classroom observations. The series of activities is as follows:

1. **Needs mapping:** UIN lecturers together with MTs teachers map the learning needs and weaknesses of PAI teachers in the field.
2. **Preparation of training modules:** Lecturers compile modules with teachers and madrasah supervisors. The material raised includes religious moderation approaches, digital media, and differentiated learning.
3. **Training implementation:** Training is conducted periodically. Lecturers become facilitators, while MTs teachers become participants as well as active discussion partners.

4. **Classroom practice and evaluation:** Teachers are asked to apply the results of the training and the results are analyzed together by the lecturer and the head of the madrasah.
5. **Collaborative research:** At the end of the program, a joint study was held to assess the impact of training on PAI learning in madrasahs.

**Impact:**

1. Teachers feel that the training is more "grounded" because it is in accordance with their real conditions.
2. Lecturers get direct input from field practice.
3. It is easier for the Ministry of Religion to formulate policies based on field and academic data.

Collaboration between madrasahs, the Ministry of Religion, and universities is the strategic key in improving the quality of PAI teacher training. The three parties have complementary roles: madrasahs as field actors, universities as providers of science and research, and the Ministry of Religion as policy directors. This synergy results in training that is not only relevant, but also measurable and structured.

From these findings, it is recommended that the PAI teacher training program be developed collaboratively from the planning stage. Islamic universities need to be actively involved in compiling materials, assisting in the implementation, and evaluating the results of training. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Religion facilitates a more open joint workspace between academics and religious education practitioners.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research highlights the fundamental problem in Islamic religious education at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, namely the uneven quality of PAI teachers, both in terms of pedagogy, the use of technology, and the understanding of contextual and moderate Islamic values. Departing from this reality, this study proposes three main strategies that can be applied to improve the quality of PAI teachers through a more relevant, applicative, and sustainable training approach. The first strategy is

the implementation of holistic blended-learning-based training, which combines face-to-face and online with a focus on strengthening the cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects of teachers. This training model has proven to be flexible, able to reach more teachers without interrupting teaching activities, and allows for a continuous learning process through online forums and mentoring. Teachers are better prepared to face the challenges of the times, such as digital literacy, value crises, and changes in students' character. The second strategy is the formation and strengthening of the professional community of PAI teachers at the madrasah or sub-district level. This community is a forum for collective reflection, sharing good practices, and self-development independently. As a result, teachers no longer feel like they are working alone, but are supported by a network of peers who reinforce each other and encourage professional growth in a participatory manner. The third strategy is to build cross-institutional collaboration between madrasahs, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and Islamic universities. This collaboration allows the training process to be designed and evaluated together, based on real needs in the field and supported by academic science and supporting policies. This strategy places the teacher as the main subject of development, not just as a passive participant. By integrating these three strategies, it is hoped that the development of the quality of PAI teachers will no longer be ceremonial, but will become a systematic, sustainable, and real joint movement in the formation of the character of the Muslim generation who are moderate, intelligent, and noble in character.

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