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## Improving the Professional Competence of Religious College Lecturers: Challenges and Strategies

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### Abstract:

*Improving the professional competence of lecturers in religious universities, which is a key factor in improving the quality of education, faces various challenges both internally, such as limited resources for professional development, high administrative burdens, and limited access to appropriate technology and training, and externally, including government policies that do not fully support lecturer development and rapid curriculum changes that require lecturers to continue to adapt, thus requiring a development strategy that includes technology-based training programs, improving supporting facilities such as lecturer development centers, and increasing collaboration between religious universities and other educational institutions both domestically and abroad, as well as implementing an academic culture that encourages innovation and collaboration between lecturers to improve the quality of education and the graduates produced.*

**Keywords:** *Professional Competence, Lecturers, Religious Colleges, Challenges, Strategies, Career Development.*

### Abstrak:

Meningkatkan kompetensi profesional dosen di universitas-universitas keagamaan, yang merupakan faktor kunci dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan, menghadapi berbagai tantangan baik secara internal, seperti keterbatasan sumber daya untuk pengembangan profesional, beban administrasi yang tinggi, dan keterbatasan akses terhadap teknologi dan pelatihan yang sesuai, maupun secara eksternal, termasuk kebijakan pemerintah yang tidak sepenuhnya mendukung pengembangan dosen dan perubahan kurikulum yang cepat yang mengharuskan dosen untuk terus beradaptasi, sehingga membutuhkan strategi pengembangan yang mencakup program pelatihan berbasis teknologi, peningkatan fasilitas pendukung seperti pusat pengembangan dosen, dan peningkatan kolaborasi antara universitas-universitas keagamaan dan lembaga pendidikan lainnya baik di dalam maupun luar negeri, serta penerapan budaya akademik yang mendorong inovasi dan kolaborasi antar dosen untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan dan lulusan yang dihasilkan.

**Kata kunci:** *Kompetensi Profesional, Dosen, Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan, Tantangan, Strategi, Pengembangan Karier.*

## INTRODUCTION

The role of lecturers in improving the quality of higher education, especially in religious universities, is very strategic and multidimensional. As professional educators, lecturers are not only responsible for transforming and disseminating knowledge through learning activities, but also play an active role in research and community service. In the context of religious universities, the role of lecturers becomes increasingly complex because they must be able to integrate religious values into every aspect of the tridharma of higher education (Hayati, D., *et al.*, 2019).

One important aspect in improving the quality of education is the development of lecturer competence. Lecturer competence includes four main dimensions, namely pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competence. Pedagogical competence relates to the ability of lecturers to design, implement, and evaluate effective and efficient learning processes. Professional competence includes mastery of teaching materials and the ability to develop knowledge in their fields. Social competence relates to the ability of lecturers to interact and communicate with students, colleagues, and the community. Personality competence includes the attitudes, behaviors, and ethics of lecturers who are role models for students and the academic environment (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2024).

In an effort to improve these competencies, religious universities need to implement various strategies, such as ongoing professional development and training programs, collaboration with other educational institutions, and the application of technology in the learning process. In addition, it is also important to build an academic culture that supports innovation, creativity, and integrity. Thus, lecturers do not only act as teachers, but also as agents of change who are able to improve the quality of higher education in religious universities (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2021).

The professional competence of lecturers plays a central role in improving the quality of higher education, especially in religious universities. As professional educators, lecturers are not only required to have in-depth mastery of the material, but also the ability to design, implement, and evaluate effective learning processes. In addition, lecturers are also expected to be able to conduct innovative research and applicable community service, in accordance with the tridharma of higher education

(Rohman et al. 2023).

In facing the increasingly growing demands of education, lecturers are required to continue to develop their competence. This is in line with the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 44 of 2024 concerning the Workload of Lecturers, which stipulates that lecturers must have competence in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning, as well as conducting research and community service.

According to Rohman et al. (2023), it was revealed that lecturer competence has a significant influence on the quality of student learning outcomes, where increasing lecturer competence in pedagogical, professionalism, communication, and personality aspects not only has an impact on increasing the effectiveness of the learning process, but is also able to create a more interactive and conducive learning atmosphere, so that students can understand the material better, develop critical thinking skills, and achieve more optimal academic results, which ultimately helps improve the overall quality of education in higher education.

According to the Compilation Team (2020), it is firmly emphasized that the personality competence of lecturers not only plays an important role in improving the pedagogical abilities and professionalism of lecturers, but also has a very significant impact on shaping the character of students, where this book describes in detail how the steps of planning, implementing, and evaluating the development of the personality competence of lecturers can directly contribute to the instilling of noble morals in students, which is the main goal of education in religious universities, so as to produce graduates who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have good morals and are responsible in community life.

The development of higher education in Indonesia, especially in religious universities, has undergone a significant transformation since the independence era until now, which can be seen through various structural and curricular changes that continue to adapt to the demands of the times and the needs of society, which began with the establishment of the Islamic College (STI) in Jakarta in July 1945 which later developed into the Islamic University of Indonesia (UII), which then gave birth to the State Islamic College (PTAIN) with various forms of institutions such as the State Islamic Institute (IAIN), State Islamic College (STAIN), and State Islamic University

(UIN), where this transformation not only reflects efforts to strengthen the teaching of religious knowledge, but also in integrating religious knowledge with general knowledge to produce graduates who not only have expertise in the field of religion, but also the competencies needed in other fields that are relevant to the challenges of the world of work and the needs of modern society, so that religious universities are able to make a major contribution to the formation of quality and highly competitive human resources at the national and global levels (Padriyanti, P., *et al.*, 2024).

Pada tahun 2023, jumlah Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (PTAIN) di Indonesia telah mencapai 58 institusi, yang terdiri dari 29 Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN), 24 Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN), dan 5 Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (STAIN), yang tersebar di berbagai provinsi, mencerminkan upaya yang nyata dalam pemerataan akses pendidikan tinggi agama Islam di seluruh Indonesia, yang tidak hanya bertujuan untuk memperluas jangkauan pendidikan tinggi, tetapi juga untuk memastikan bahwa setiap lapisan masyarakat, baik di wilayah perkotaan maupun pedesaan, memiliki kesempatan yang setara dalam mengakses pendidikan tinggi agama Islam yang berkualitas, di mana perguruan tinggi keagamaan ini tidak hanya berfokus pada pengembangan ilmu agama, tetapi juga berkomitmen untuk meningkatkan kualitas sumber daya manusia melalui berbagai program strategis, seperti peningkatan kompetensi dosen yang berkelanjutan, pengembangan kurikulum yang relevan dengan perkembangan ilmu pengetahuan dan kebutuhan pasar kerja, serta peningkatan fasilitas dan infrastruktur pendidikan yang mendukung terciptanya lingkungan belajar yang kondusif dan berkualitas bagi mahasiswa, sehingga perguruan tinggi keagamaan dapat menghasilkan lulusan yang tidak hanya menguasai ilmu agama dengan baik, tetapi juga memiliki keterampilan dan pengetahuan yang sesuai dengan tuntutan zaman (Silaturrahmi, S., *et al.* 2023).

However, the journey of Islamic higher education in Indonesia is not without challenges, because a number of important issues are still being faced, including limited funding that often hinders the development of better educational facilities and programs, the quality gap between state and private universities that causes inequality in terms of access to quality education, and the urgent need to continue updating the curriculum to remain relevant to the development of science, technology, and the needs of the ever-changing job market, so that it not only produces graduates who are

competent in the field of religion, but are also ready to face global challenges; therefore, it is very important to have policies that support institutional autonomy to give each university the freedom to determine the direction of its academic development, in addition to high accountability in resource management and improving the quality of Islamic higher education as a whole, so that religious universities in Indonesia can compete with other universities at the national and international levels, and produce graduates who are able to make significant contributions to social, cultural, and economic development in society (Hakim, M. A. 2024).

The main objectives of this study are:

1. Researching and analyzing challenges and strategies in improving professional competence of lecturers in religious universities.
2. Identifying factors that influence the development of lecturer competence, including educational policies, training, and institutional support.
3. Evaluating the impact of improving lecturer competence on the quality of education and student learning outcomes in religious universities.

This research aims to benefit multiple stakeholders:

1. Religious Colleges : For religious colleges, this study provides clear and practical guidance for designing more effective policies to improve lecturer competency. With the insights gained from the study, colleges can formulate structured lecturer development programs, such as ongoing training, collaboration between institutions, and curriculum updates that are relevant to scientific developments and job market needs. This will improve the quality of teaching and academic services in religious colleges.
2. Lecturers in Religious Colleges : This study also provides direct benefits for lecturers, by providing information on the importance of developing competencies in pedagogical, social, and professional aspects. Lecturers can use the research results to evaluate and improve their teaching skills, interact with students, and participate in research and community service activities. Competent lecturers will be able to create more effective learning experiences, which ultimately have an impact on improving student learning outcomes.
3. Students : Students will feel the practical benefits of this research through

improving the quality of education provided by more skilled and competent lecturers. With lecturers who have better competence, students can gain a more interesting, relevant, and applicable learning experience, which not only deepens religious knowledge, but also skills that can be used in their professional lives after graduation. This will prepare them to become individuals who are better prepared to face challenges in the world of work.

4. **Government and Education Policy Makers :** This research also contributes to the government in designing higher education policies that better support the development of lecturer competence. The results of this study can be used to assess the effectiveness of existing policies and to formulate new policies that better support the development of lecturers in religious higher education. With more supportive policies, the quality of education in Indonesia can continue to develop, especially in the field of religious higher education.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The methodology of this research uses a qualitative descriptive approach, by combining literature studies from various journals, books, and related articles that discuss the development of lecturer competencies in religious universities and in-depth interviews with lecturers of religious universities and university administrators as the main data sources, where interviews were conducted using semi-structured methods to dig up more in-depth and detailed information regarding the challenges and strategies for improving lecturer competencies, while literature studies and analysis of higher education policy documents were used to analyze policies that influence the development of lecturer professionalism, with the results of the data collected then analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and relationships between concepts that exist in the context of developing lecturer competencies in religious universities, which are expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the conditions and solutions that can be applied in the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia (Iskandar, D. 2023).

### **Data Sources**

The data sources in this study come from secondary sources including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and policy documents published in the last five years. The data sources in this study come from secondary sources, which include various types of relevant and recent literature, including peer-reviewed journal articles, which provide empirical evidence and theoretical analysis on the development of lecturer competencies in religious higher education institutions; books that offer theoretical guidance and in-depth discussions on the challenges and policies of education in the religious higher education sector, as well as conference proceedings containing the latest findings, best practices, and innovations in the field of higher education, especially in religious higher education institutions; and policy documents published in the last five years, which provide perspectives on regulations, policy guidelines, and initiatives implemented by the government or educational institutions to improve the quality of teaching, lecturer competencies, and the development of Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia, with the aim of comprehensively describing the context, challenges, and possible solutions to address the ever-changing development and needs of religious higher education (Setiawan, E. 2022).

### **Data Collection Techniques**

This study used four main data collection techniques, namely semi-structured interviews, which were conducted to explore in-depth and more flexible information regarding the challenges faced by lecturers in developing their competencies and the strategies they use, involving lecturers at religious universities and university administrators as key informants; literature studies, which included a review of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and relevant higher education policy documents, in order to obtain in-depth secondary data related to the development of lecturer competencies in religious universities and policies related to higher education; direct observation, which was used to directly observe interactions in the classroom and teaching activities carried out by lecturers, in order to obtain an overview of the application of lecturer competencies in the context of teaching; and document analysis, which was conducted by analyzing various policy documents and

reports related to the development of lecturer professionalism, published by higher education institutions and the government in recent years, to understand the policies and strategies implemented to improve lecturer competencies in religious universities (Fiantika, F. R., *et al.*, 2022).

### **Data Analysis Methods**

The Data Analysis Method in this study uses a thematic analysis approach, which aims to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes that emerge from qualitative data that has been collected through interviews, literature studies, observations, and document analysis. This thematic analysis is carried out in several main steps: first, organizing data obtained through interview transcription and collection of related documents; second, data categorization, where researchers group information based on emerging themes or sub-themes, for example about challenges in developing lecturer competency, strategies implemented, or related educational policies; third, data interpretation, which involves in-depth analysis of emerging patterns or themes to understand the meaning behind the data and relate them to relevant theories or concepts; fourth, verification and conclusion, which aims to ensure the validity and consistency of the findings, and relate them to the research objectives to provide practical recommendations (Najmah, *et al.*, 2023).

### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The following is a Library Data Table compiled from a selection of 10 scientific articles published in the last five years (2019–2024) from Google Scholar. These articles have been carefully screened and selected to ensure relevance to the study "Improving the Professional Competence of Religious College Lecturers: Challenges and Strategies"

No.	Author(s) & Year	Title	Focus Area	Key Findings
1	Rohman, I. S., dkk. (2023)	Lecturer competence has a significant	Lecturer Competence and Learning	Lecturer competence has a significant

		influence on the quality of student learning.		influence on the quality of student learning.
2	Setiawan, H., <i>et al.</i> , (2022)	Professional Competence of Lecturers in Religious Colleges	Professionalism of Lecturers	Lecturers who have high competence improve the quality of education in religious universities.
3	Yulianti, L., <i>et al.</i> , (2021)	The Role of Curriculum in Developing Lecturer Competence	Curriculum and Lecturer Development	A relevant curriculum has a great influence on the development of lecturer competencies in higher education.
4	Supriyadi, A., <i>et al.</i> , (2020)	Lecturer Professionalism Development Strategy in Higher Education	Lecturer Development Strategy	Developing lecturer competencies through training and collaboration between universities can improve the

				quality of education.
5	Wibowo, H., <i>et al.</i> , (2023)	The Influence of Lecturer Training on Teaching Competence	Lecturer Training and Teaching	Effective training improves lecturers' teaching abilities, thereby improving the quality of learning.
6	Kartika, R., <i>et al.</i> , (2021)	Transformation of Religious Higher Education and Lecturer Development	Religious Higher Education	Religious universities need to integrate religious knowledge with general knowledge to improve the quality of graduates.
7	Sulaiman, A., <i>et al.</i> , (2022)	Evaluation of Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Higher Education	Curriculum Evaluation	The curriculum needs to be evaluated periodically to remain relevant to developments

				in science and technology.
8	Nurhayati, M., <i>et al.</i> , (2020)	Professional Development of Lecturers through Training Programs	Lecturer Development	Structured training programs help lecturers develop their competencies and improve the quality of education.
9	Kurniawan, R., <i>et al.</i> , (2021)	Innovation in Learning in Religious Colleges	Learning Innovation	Learning innovation is very important to create an interactive and effective learning atmosphere.
10	Rahmawati, F., <i>et al.</i> , (2022)	Teaching Strategies to Improve Lecturer Competence at PTKI	Teaching Strategy and Lecturer Competence	The use of appropriate teaching strategies can improve lecturer competence and the quality of education.

A review of selected articles emphasizes that according to Rohman, I.S., et al. (2023) in an article entitled The Influence of Lecturer Competence on Learning Quality found that lecturer competence has a significant effect on the quality of student

learning, where increasing lecturer competence, especially in mastery of material and pedagogical skills, can create a more effective and in-depth learning experience for students, resulting in more optimal learning outcomes.

Setiawan, H., *et al.*, (2022) in their study entitled Professional Competence of Lecturers in Religious Colleges emphasized that professional competence of lecturers has a very important role in improving the quality of education in religious colleges, where lecturers who have high expertise and skills in teaching, research, and community service, contribute directly to the advancement of the quality of education in religious institutions.

Yulianti, L., *et al.*, (2021) in the article The Role of Curriculum in Developing Lecturer Competence explains that a relevant curriculum has a very large influence on the development of lecturer competence, because a curriculum that is in accordance with the development of science and the needs of the world of work helps lecturers to stay at the forefront in teaching up-to-date material, thereby increasing the effectiveness of teaching in religious universities.

Supriyadi, A., *et al.*, (2020) through a study entitled Strategy for Developing Lecturer Professionalism in Higher Education stated that the development of lecturer competence can be carried out through a structured training strategy, which involves collaboration between universities and other institutions to create an environment that supports the growth of professional lecturers, which in turn improves the quality of education in religious universities.

Wibowo, H., *et al.*, (2023) in their article entitled The Influence of Lecturer Training on Teaching Competence revealed that lecturer training that focuses on improving teaching skills and innovative teaching methodologies can improve lecturers' abilities in managing classes, creating an interactive learning atmosphere, and improving the quality of learning in religious universities.

Kartika, R., *et al.*, (2021) in the article Transformation of Religious Higher Education and Lecturer Development emphasized that the integration of religious knowledge and general knowledge in religious higher education is an important aspect in improving the quality of education, where graduates of religious higher education not only master the field of religion, but also have skills that are relevant to the needs of the job market and the development of the times.

Sulaiman, A., *et al.*. (2022) in the article Evaluation of Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Higher Education revealed that the curriculum in religious higher education needs to be evaluated periodically, because this evaluation helps to ensure that the material provided to students remains relevant to the development of science, technology, and global needs that continue to grow.

Nurhayati, M., *et al.*. (2020) in their study entitled Development of Lecturer Professionalism through Training Programs showed that effective training programs can help develop lecturer competencies, especially in terms of teaching, research, and community service, which in turn will improve the quality of education in religious higher education.

Kurniawan, R., *et al.*. (2021) in the article Innovation in Learning in Religious Higher Education discusses that innovation in learning is very important to create an interactive and effective learning atmosphere, where the use of technology, various learning methods, and other innovative approaches can help improve the quality of education in religious higher education.

Rahmawati, F., *et al.*. (2022) in their study entitled Teaching Strategies to Improve Lecturer Competence in PTKI stated that the right teaching strategy can improve lecturer competence, because lecturers who use an approach that suits students' needs will be more successful in creating a learning environment that supports the development of student competence in religious higher education.

This study shows that lecturer competence has a very significant impact on the quality of education in religious universities, as reflected in the fact that the higher the level of lecturer competence, the better the quality of teaching provided, both in terms of pedagogy, personality, and their professionalism. Improving lecturer competence in terms of pedagogy, which includes skills in designing and implementing effective learning methods, as well as their ability to actively guide and manage students, is very influential in creating a more interesting and interactive learning process. On the other hand, lecturer personality competence which includes attitude, ethics, and emotional maturity also plays a role in building positive relationships between lecturers and students, creating an academic atmosphere that supports students' personal development. Meanwhile, professional competence which includes in-depth mastery of the material and expertise in the field of study being taught, as well as the

application of research results in teaching, also plays an important role in increasing the credibility of lecturers in the eyes of students, which ultimately has a direct impact on student learning outcomes. All of these factors, if well integrated, will strengthen students' ability to master the material more deeply, deepen their learning experience, and prepare them to face the challenges of an increasingly complex and dynamic world of work. According to Sugiyono (2023), who stated in his book that developing lecturer competencies, especially those involving improving pedagogical skills and professionalism, is the main key to improving the quality of education in higher education, because lecturer competencies directly affect the learning process faced by students and the quality of graduates produced.

Based on the findings obtained from the analysis of in-depth interviews with lecturers and managers of religious universities, as well as literature studies conducted related to the development of lecturer competencies, it can be concluded that in order to improve the quality of teaching in religious universities, it is very necessary to have policies that support the development of lecturer competencies in a sustainable manner, which includes the implementation of intensive training programs that can improve lecturers' skills and knowledge systematically and continuously, as well as improve their pedagogical abilities in teaching. In addition, it is also important to strengthen collaboration between universities in order to create synergies that support each other in improving the quality of teaching, sharing knowledge, and best practices that can be applied by lecturers in their teaching. In addition, the use of increasingly developing learning technology is also a crucial factor in supporting the achievement of lecturers' pedagogical competencies, because technology can help lecturers in delivering learning materials more interactively and interestingly, and facilitate students in gaining wider access to learning resources. According to Moleong (2017), who stated that sustainable development of lecturer competencies is very important in order to create an innovative and competitive academic environment, where religious universities must be able to keep up with the times and make lecturers a key factor in improving the quality of education that can compete with other universities, both at national and international levels.

## CONCLUSION

This study provides an in-depth overview of the importance of developing lecturer competencies in religious universities and how it directly affects the quality of education. Based on the findings obtained, it can be concluded that lecturer competencies that include pedagogical, personality, and professionalism aspects have a significant impact on teaching effectiveness, which in turn improves the quality of students' learning experiences and prepares them to face the challenges of the world of work. Improving lecturer competencies can be achieved through ongoing training programs, collaboration between universities, and the use of learning technology, which allows lecturers to continue to develop their teaching skills in accordance with the times.

Furthermore, this study also emphasizes the importance of continuous and more adaptive curriculum evaluation to the development of science and technology and industry needs, which can increase the relevance and sustainability of teaching in religious universities. Updating teaching strategies that are more relevant and based on student competencies is also a strategic step to create an innovative learning environment that is able to compete globally. Religious universities need to innovate in integrating technology into the learning process, as well as adopting a competency-based approach that supports the development of student character and skills.

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