Self-Directed Learning Practices of Teachers and Their Implications for Learning Quality at Madrasah

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to identify and analyze the independent efforts undertaken by teachers at *Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Meeto* in improving their professional skills. It also explores the supporting and inhibiting factors in these efforts, as well as their impact on the quality of learning. Using qualitative methods through teacher interviews and document analysis, the findings reveal that teachers' motivations vary, ranging from moral responsibility to the demands of scientific development. Independent efforts identified include reading academic literature, participating in training, and engaging in collegial collaboration. Nevertheless, teachers face obstacles such as limited time and restricted access to appropriate learning resources. Despite these challenges, the independent efforts contribute positively to enhancing the quality of learning and improving students' understanding.

Keywords: Independent efforts, professional competence, teachers, Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Meeto , learning quality.

ABSTRAK*: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis upaya mandiri yang dilakukan oleh guru di Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Meeto dalam meningkatkan keterampilan profesional mereka. Penelitian ini juga mengeksplorasi faktor-faktor yang mendukung dan menghambat upaya tersebut, serta menganalisis dampaknya terhadap kualitas pembelajaran. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui wawancara guru dan analisis dokumen, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa motivasi guru beragam, mulai dari tanggung jawab moral hingga tuntutan perkembangan keilmuan. Upaya mandiri yang teridentifikasi meliputi membaca literatur akademik, mengikuti pelatihan, dan menjalin kolaborasi dengan rekan sejawat. Namun*

demikian, guru menghadapi hambatan berupa keterbatasan waktu dan akses terhadap sumber belajar yang memadai. Meskipun terdapat kendala, upaya mandiri tersebut memberikan dampak positif dalam meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran dan pemahaman siswa.

Kata Kunci: *kompetensi profesional, kualitas pembelajaran guru, Madrasah, Aliyah Al-Islam Meeto, upaya mandiri.*

INTRODUCTION

In an era of rapidly evolving globalization, demands for quality education are increasingly high. Improving teacher competency is a top priority to ensure competitive quality education in the modern era (Hasanah, 2020). This is in line with Law No. 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, which emphasizes that teachers play a crucial role in shaping the nation's next generation. Teachers serve not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as guides in a dynamic and adaptive learning process to changing times (Damayanti et al., 2024). In this context, teachers' ability to continuously improve their skills through self-development is crucial. Another relevant regulation is Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 16 of 2007, which establishes competency standards that teachers must possess, including pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies. These standards are expected to serve as a reference for teachers to continuously develop themselves.

Various previous studies have shown that independent development is an effective way to improve teacher skills and competencies (Azmi et al., 2024). Their research found that teachers who actively participate in independent development programs, such as online training and learning communities, experience significant improvements in their teaching abilities. Teachers engaged in lifelong learning demonstrate greater proficiency in adapting innovative teaching methods, utilizing educational technology, and managing classrooms more effectively. Another study by Hariyadi (2023) also states that independent professional development not only improves pedagogical skills but also strengthens teachers' internal motivation to continue learning and innovating in the learning process. However, while regulations and scientific evidence support the importance of independent teacher development, the reality on the ground is less than ideal. At Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Meeto, observations indicate an urgent need to improve teacher competency to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Most teachers still tend to use conventional teaching methods that are less suited to the demands of modern learning. The use of technology in the learning process is also suboptimal, and many teachers do not fully understand how to integrate technology into their teaching strategies. Furthermore, limited access to formal training programs and a lack of institutional support for teacher self-development are major obstacles. These facts indicate that although regulations related to improving teacher competency exist, their implementation has not yet been fully achieved at the madrasah level.

This situation creates a gap between expectations and reality. On the one hand, regulations provide clear guidelines regarding teacher competency standards, and previous research has demonstrated the importance of independent development. However, on the other hand, many teachers in the field still do not actively participate in independent professional development activities. Teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Meeto, for example, face various obstacles that prevent them from engaging in self-development, including limited resources, lack of access to quality training, and minimal support from the madrasah. This impacts the quality of learning provided to students, where teaching methods tend to be monotonous and unresponsive to students' needs in the digital age.

This research premise is that independent efforts undertaken by teachers can be an effective solution to bridge this gap. Teachers who actively engage in self-development activities, such as taking online courses, reading the latest educational literature, or joining professional learning communities, will be better able to apply innovative approaches in their teaching. This research assumes that the more frequently a teacher participates in self-development activities, the higher their teaching proficiency. With continuously updated skills, teachers will be better prepared to face various challenges in the learning process, including the effective use of technology and the implementation of student-centered learning methods.

In this context, this study aims to explore how self-development efforts can improve teacher competency at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Meeto. The researchers believe that if given the right encouragement, teachers can independently develop their competencies without relying too heavily on formal training provided by educational institutions. These efforts will positively impact the quality of their teaching, ultimately improving the quality of education at the madrasah.

This research hopes to identify strategies that can encourage teachers to be more active in self-development, as well as provide recommendations for madrasahs to support teacher self-development activities. Therefore, the results of this research are expected to contribute not only to improving teacher competency but also to formulating educational policies that better support sustainable teacher professional development .

METHOD

The research used is qualitative research, using an inductive approach to explore in depth the experiences and perspectives of teachers regarding independent efforts made by teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Meeto to improve their professional skills. According to Ramdhan, (2021) defines the descriptive method as a method used to describe or analyze research results but is not used to draw broader conclusions.

According to Mukhirto, (2022) qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior, with the aim of understanding the phenomena that occur, namely

behavior, perception, motivation and action. Because it is carried out in a natural setting, this qualitative research approach is often referred to as a "naturalistic research method. Through interviews and training certificates, this study explores the independent efforts made by teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Meeto to improve their professional skills.

This study focuses on independent efforts undertaken by teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Meeto to improve their professional skills. The research subjects were selected using a purposive sampling method, which took into account their experiences on independent efforts undertaken by teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Meeto to improve their professional skills. According to Wulandari and Efendi, (2022) purposive sampling is a sampling technique with certain considerations that aim to make the data obtained more in line with the focus of the research.

The selection of this subject involved five teachers at the madrasah: Islamic Religious Education (PAI), Civics Education (PKN), Economics, English, and Mathematics. With their involvement as teachers, this study is expected to make a significant contribution in formulating relevant recommendations for independent efforts undertaken by teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Al-Islam Meeto to improve their professional skills.

The data collection sources and techniques in this study were conducted using primary and secondary data sources (Fadilla and Wulandari, 2023). Primary data is data obtained from primary sources in the field, such as the results of interviews conducted by researcher Wahyuningsih, 2021). Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with teachers.

According to Tasyah et al., (2021), secondary data is data collected and provided by other parties, either in print or digital form, which is used to support current research. Examples include data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), company annual reports, or scientific journals. Documentation is included in secondary data, which is used by researchers to support analysis or complement primary data collected directly. By combining these data sources in research, a comprehensive picture can be provided. Furthermore, research instruments are carefully prepared through a process involving literature review and the development of questionnaire items to ensure accuracy and relevance to learning objectives.

The data analysis technique used was thematic analysis (Figure 1), which is a method for qualitative data analysis used to identify, analyze, and report patterns or themes in the data (Sarosa, 2021). This method helps researchers understand the deeper meaning of the data obtained, both from interviews and from the interviews.
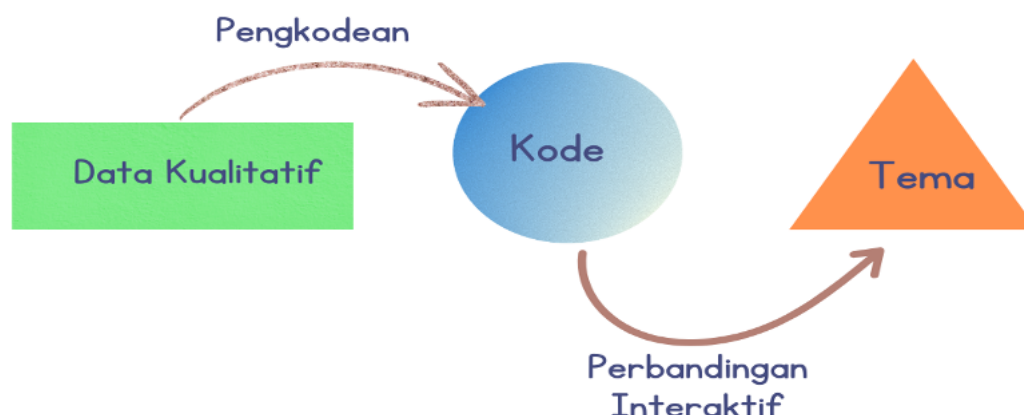
Figure 1. Thematic Analysis

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Teacher Motivation and Challenges in Independent Professional Development Efforts

Based on the results of the interviews conducted, the primary motivations of the teachers in making independent efforts to improve their professional skills varied but shared a common goal: improving the quality of teaching and student understanding. An Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher stated, "I want to be a better teacher and provide a deeper understanding of religion to students." This indicates a desire to increase the effectiveness of conveying religious material so that it is easier for students to understand and apply in their daily lives. Meanwhile, a Civics (PKN) teacher expressed, "I feel my responsibility as an educator requires me to continue learning so that I can provide relevant material." This statement emphasizes that a teacher's responsibility is not only limited to delivering material, but also ensures that the material taught is always in line with current developments and student needs.

In the field of economics, the rapid dynamics of change are a major factor that motivates teachers to continuously update their knowledge. An Economics teacher stated, "Changes in the world of economics are very rapid, so I have to constantly update my knowledge to be able to teach current material." An English teacher also shared a similar motivation, stating, "I want to ensure that the English teaching methods I use are always up-to-date with the latest developments." This indicates that the use of innovative teaching methods is one of the main focuses of teachers in improving the effectiveness of learning. Meanwhile, a Mathematics teacher added, "I want my students to understand mathematical concepts more easily, so I am constantly looking for more effective teaching methods." From these various answers, it is clear that the motivations of teachers in improving their professionalism are very diverse, ranging from moral responsibility to the demands of scientific and technological developments.

Teachers' Independent Efforts to Improve Professional Competence: Strategies, Learning Resources, and Utilization of Technology

Based on interviews with teachers, the independent efforts they most frequently undertake to improve their professional competence vary according to their respective areas of expertise. Similarly, a recapitulation of relevant documents collected shows that the trainings teachers have attended support the generalization of the findings from the interviews above.

An Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher stated that he often reads books and journals on Islamic education and attends religious studies to deepen his understanding, "I always make time to read interpretation books and Islamic education journals so I can convey the material in more depth to students." Meanwhile, a Citizenship Education (PKN) teacher attends more seminars and discussions related to character education and citizenship, "I am active in seminars and discussions because character education is very important in shaping students' attitudes." An Economics teacher chooses to take online training and read the latest economic news to stay relevant with developments in the economic world, "The economic world is constantly evolving, so I have to always follow the news and training so that the material I teach remains up-to-date." An English teacher utilizes online learning platforms such as Coursera and Duolingo to improve his understanding of English teaching methods, "I regularly use Duolingo to improve my language comprehension and look for the latest methods in teaching English." Meanwhile, a Mathematics teacher experiments more with new teaching methods in class and seeks references from mathematics education journals, "I often try new methods in class and seek references from mathematics journals to improve the effectiveness of learning

Collaboration and Mentoring in Teacher Professional Development: Efforts to Improve the Quality of Learning

Based on the interview results, the teachers acknowledged that having mentors or peers was very helpful in their professional development. An Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher stated that he often discussed with religious scholars and senior teachers to find more effective teaching methods, "I often ask religious scholars and more experienced teachers so that I can convey the material better." A Citizenship Education (PKN) teacher relied on the guidance of a lecturer who always provided input on better learning strategies, "My lecturer often gave me input on how to convey the material to make it more interesting for students." Meanwhile, an Economics teacher collaborated with fellow economics teachers to share teaching strategies, "My fellow economics teachers and I often exchange experiences so that the methods we use remain relevant." An English teacher joined a language teacher community that often shared experiences and teaching tips, "In this community, we share strategies for teaching language more

interactively and effectively." Meanwhile, a Mathematics teacher discussed with colleagues how to convey concepts more easily understood by students, "I often exchange ideas with fellow mathematics teachers so that difficult concepts can be explained more simply."

In terms of sharing the knowledge they have acquired, teachers employ various methods. The Islamic Religious Education teacher actively shares insights in the Islamic Religious Education teacher forum, "I often share experiences and new materials in the teacher forum to broaden our collective knowledge." The Civics teacher holds small discussions with other teachers at the school, "I invite other teachers to discuss to find solutions together to face learning challenges." The Economics teacher writes articles on an educational blog and shares materials with colleagues, "I write on the blog so that more teachers can access the materials I develop." The English teacher holds small trainings for language teachers at her school, "I share new techniques with fellow teachers to make language learning methods more effective." Meanwhile, the Mathematics teacher demonstrates new methods in teacher meetings, "I show the teaching techniques I have learned so that other teachers can apply them.

Challenges and Strategies for Teachers in Independent Professional Development Efforts

Interviews revealed that teachers face various challenges in independently improving their professional competence. One of the main obstacles is limited time due to teaching duties and other responsibilities. As one Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher stated, "Lack of time due to teaching duties and extracurricular activities is my biggest challenge." In this context, additional tasks such as administrative preparation, lesson planning, and evaluating student learning outcomes often take up time that could be used for self-development. Teachers often have to sacrifice personal time to attend training or find new teaching materials to improve the quality of their teaching.

Besides time constraints, access to appropriate learning resources is also a challenge for some teachers. A Civics teacher revealed that she faces difficulties finding learning resources relevant to the curriculum she teaches. "The difficulty in finding learning resources that truly align with the curriculum I teach is often a major obstacle," she said. Constant changes in curriculum and educational policies require teachers to continually update their knowledge. However, available materials are often outdated or do not meet the specific needs of their classrooms, forcing teachers to seek alternatives for accurate and relevant resources.

The Impact of Teachers' Independent Efforts in Improving Professional Competence and the Quality of Student Learning

Interview results showed that teachers had various ways of measuring the success of their independent efforts to improve their teaching competencies. Islamic Religious

Education teachers assessed their success by improving students' understanding of religious material. "I see it from the students' improved understanding of the religious material I teach."

Meanwhile, the Civics Teacher observed students' responses in applying civic values, "I assess from students' responses and how they apply civic values in everyday life." The Economics Teacher assessed success from students' increased interest in economics and their ability to apply economic concepts, "If students are more interested in economics and are able to apply the concepts, I consider it a success." The English Teacher saw students' increased confidence in speaking as an indicator of success, "I observed whether students were more confident in speaking English after I implemented the new method." Meanwhile, the Mathematics Teacher assessed success from students' speed in understanding concepts and their improved test scores, "If students understand math concepts more quickly and their test scores improve, that's a sign of success.

Teachers' Independent Efforts in Professional Development: Strategies, Challenges, and Their Impact on Learning Quality

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Furthermore, their independent efforts also significantly impacted their teaching methods. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers felt more confident in delivering material by relating it to real life, "I am more confident in delivering material and relating it to real life." Civics (PKN) teachers felt more flexible in using various learning methods, "I can be more flexible in using various learning methods." Economics teachers saw a change in students' enthusiasm for learning due to the material being more relevant to their lives, "My students are more enthusiastic in learning because I deliver the material in a more relevant way.

Discussion

Teachers' Independent Professional Development: Theories, Strategies, and Their Impact on Learning Quality

Teacher professional development is an ongoing process aimed at improving the competence, effectiveness, and quality of learning provided to students (Muzaffar et al. 2023). In the ever-evolving world of education, the need to improve skills and knowledge is becoming increasingly important. Teachers are not only tasked with teaching based on the curriculum but also must continually update their competencies to face new challenges in the educational world.

In general, there are two main approaches to teacher professional development. First, structured professional development through formal training, seminars, and workshops organized by educational institutions. Second, independent professional development carried out on the teacher's own initiative without coercion or intervention from outside parties. Independent efforts to improve professional competence demonstrate a strong awareness and intrinsic motivation to develop teaching skills and improve the quality of learning in the classroom (Sholeh and Efendi, 2023).

Teacher Motivation in Independent Professional Development Efforts

Motivation is a key factor in teacher professional development, as an educator's internal and external drives can determine the extent to which they strive to improve their competency. The Self-Determination Theory, developed by (Lidia Susanti, 2020), explains that individuals with intrinsic motivation tend to be more active in developing themselves independently. This intrinsic motivation originates from within the individual, such as curiosity, satisfaction in teaching, and the desire to improve student understanding. Conversely, extrinsic motivation arises from external factors, such as rewards, social recognition, or administrative demands. In the context of teacher independent professional development, intrinsic motivation plays a more dominant role than extrinsic motivation, because the initiative to improve competency does not depend on school policies or formal obligations, but rather stems from personal awareness and a desire to continue developing.

This study found that the interviewed teachers demonstrated high levels of intrinsic motivation in developing their professionalism. Many teachers stated that they were driven to continue learning and improving their teaching skills because they wanted to provide better understanding to their students. They recognized that each student has a different learning style, making it crucial to adapt teaching methods to their needs. This aligns with research (Nurishlah et al., 2023) which states that teachers with intrinsic motivation are more creative and flexible in facing learning challenges. Teachers who are aware of the importance of professional development also tend to be more open to changes in education, such as the implementation of technology in learning or the use of more effective innovative approaches.

Strategies Used in Independent Professional Development

In an effort to improve their teaching competence and effectiveness, teachers employ various strategies for independent professional development. Research shows that these strategies reflect teachers' initiative and creativity in adapting learning methods to students' needs and developments in the educational world. Some key strategies identified in interviews include exploring new learning methods, utilizing digital learning resources, and collaborating with fellow teachers in professional communities. These strategies not only help teachers improve their understanding of more effective learning concepts but also positively impact the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes.

One of the main strategies used by teachers in their independent professional development is exploring new learning methods. Teachers actively seek more innovative approaches to improve the effectiveness of classroom learning. Several teachers interviewed revealed that they have tried project-based learning methods, flipped classrooms, and gamification approaches to make learning more engaging for students. This approach aligns with research (Yu, 2024), which emphasizes that innovation in learning strategies contributes to increased student understanding and engagement. Project-based learning, for example, provides opportunities for students to more actively explore taught concepts and develop critical thinking skills. Meanwhile, gamification allows learning to be more interactive and enjoyable by adding game elements to the learning process. By trying various new methods, teachers can find the approach that best suits their students' characteristics and needs, resulting in more effective and meaningful learning.

Challenges in Independent Professional Development

Despite their high motivation to continuously develop, teachers face various challenges in developing their competencies independently. These challenges stem not only from internal factors, such as limited time and individual awareness, but also from external factors, such as a lack of institutional support and limited resources. This study identified several key barriers faced by teachers in their independent professional development efforts: limited time, a lack of resources and institutional support, and a low awareness of the importance of continuous professional development.

One of the biggest challenges teachers face in their independent professional development is time constraints. Many teachers report that busy teaching schedules, mounting administrative tasks, and other school responsibilities make it difficult for them to find time for self-development. In some cases, teachers even have to bring homework, such as grading student assignments or preparing teaching materials for the next class, further limiting the time they can spend learning and improving their professional skills. This time constraint aligns with findings (Foster, 2024), which state that lack of time is a major barrier to teacher professional development. Teachers with high workloads tend to find it more difficult to participate in additional training or find learning resources

independently, leading them to rely more on their existing teaching methods. This can lead to stagnation in teaching and reduce opportunities for teachers to adopt more innovative and effective learning strategies.

The Impact of Independent Professional Development on Learning Quality

Independent professional development efforts undertaken by teachers have a significant impact on the quality of student learning. Various studies have shown that teachers who continuously develop their competencies independently tend to have more innovative and effective teaching strategies, which ultimately impact student understanding, learning motivation, and academic outcomes. Based on interviews conducted in this study, it was found that teachers who actively seek ways to improve their teaching skills are able to create a more dynamic and engaging learning environment for students. The positive impact of this independent professional development is felt not only by teachers but also by students who directly benefit from the improved quality of teaching.

One of the main impacts of independent professional development is improved student understanding of the subject matter. Teachers who actively explore new learning methods are able to present material in a more engaging and understandable way for students. In this study, several teachers reported that after implementing a project-based learning approach and more interactive discussion methods, students demonstrated a better understanding of the subject matter. This aligns with findings (Hattie, 2023), which state that the quality of teacher instruction has a significant impact on student learning outcomes. When teachers improve their teaching skills through independent professional development, they can identify more effective teaching techniques that are tailored to students' needs. Furthermore, more varied and experience-based learning methods help students connect theory with practice, thereby increasing their absorption of the material being taught.

CONCLUSION

From this study, it can be concluded that independent professional development of teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Al Islam Meeto has a significant impact on improving the skills and quality of learning. In an increasingly dynamic educational context, teachers are required to constantly adapt and improve their competencies. Independent professional development is one effective solution to meet these demands. Through various strategies, such as exploring new methods, utilizing technology, and collaborating with fellow teachers, teachers can continuously improve their competencies. For example, a teacher who previously relied solely on textbooks is now beginning to explore the use of multimedia in learning, thereby making teaching materials more engaging and interactive.

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