

Needs Analysis of English Language Competencies for Prospective Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Teachers in Islamic Higher Education

**Moh. Zainol Kamal¹⁾, Ukhtul Iffah²⁾, Ahmad Effendi³⁾, Moh. Wardi⁴⁾, Nufil Indriyani⁵⁾
Hodairiyah⁶⁾**

^{1,3,5} Islamic Teaching and Learning Department, STIT Aqidah Usymuni Sumenep

²⁾ Islamic Education, Faculty of Tarbiyah, University of Ibrahimy

⁴⁾ Post Graduate Department, Universitas Islam Madura

⁶⁾ Indonesian Education and Literature Department, Universitas PGRI Sumenep

Email Correspondence : zainol_kamal@stitasumenep.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Needs Analysis
English Competencies
PAI

Article History:

Received : xx Month Year

Revised : xx Month Year

Accepted : xx Month Year

Published : xx Month Year

ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the English language competency needs of prospective Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in Islamic higher education institutions. The study was conducted at STIT Aqidah Usymuni Sumenep as the research site, and the informants included lecturers, students, and alumni. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to describe the English language competency needs of prospective PAI teachers in Islamic higher education institutions. The study highlighted two main aspects of needs: objective needs and learning needs. Objectively, the findings indicated that students needed reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to understand academic texts and communicate in scholarly contexts. From a learning perspective, the findings showed that English instruction needed to be relevant to Islamic studies through an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach. The findings suggested that Islamic higher education institutions needed to design contextual and systematic English programs to support the professional development and global competitiveness of prospective PAI teachers.

1. Introduction

The development of globalization has brought significant changes in various aspects of life, including the field of education. The increasingly open flow of information, knowledge, and technology requires individuals to possess the ability to adapt to the global

environment. English plays a role as an international language that serves as the primary medium for academic communication, scientific publication, knowledge exchange, and cross-border collaboration. Therefore, mastery of English language competence is no longer merely an added value, but has become a fundamental necessity in higher education (Swami, 2025).

Islamic higher education institutions bear a strategic responsibility to prepare graduates who are not only academically competent but also capable of actively participating in global dynamics (Hajar, 2024). The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) study program, in particular, is tasked with producing prospective teachers who are professional, possess integrity, and have a broad understanding of developments in knowledge and education. The challenges faced by prospective PAI teachers today are not limited to mastering Islamic subject matter and pedagogy, but also include the ability to access global learning resources, the majority of which are available in English (Edy & Arifin, 2024).

A substantial body of recent literature on education, teaching methodologies, educational technology, and contemporary Islamic studies is published in English. Without adequate English language competence, prospective PAI teachers will face limitations in broadening their academic perspectives, keeping pace with international research developments, and developing instructional innovations that are relevant to contemporary needs (Kamal et al., 2025). This situation has the potential to create a gap between the professional demands placed on teachers in the global era and the competencies possessed by graduates of Islamic higher education institutions (Kamal, 2025).

National education policies increasingly emphasize the improvement of quality and competitiveness among higher education graduates. Graduate competency standards highlight the importance of communication skills, digital literacy, and openness to global developments (Khan et al., 2022). English language competence has become an integral part of teachers' professional competence. PAI teachers are not only required to teach Islamic values contextually, but are also expected to be able to explain Islamic teachings from a moderate, inclusive perspective that is relevant to international developments (Muzaki et al., 2025).

The reality in the field indicates that English language instruction in many Islamic higher education institutions is often not designed based on a specific needs analysis. The materials provided tend to be general in nature and have not been fully integrated with the academic and professional needs of prospective PAI teachers. In fact, the linguistic needs of PAI students certainly differ from those of students in other study programs. They require the ability to read academic texts, comprehend international journal articles, produce scholarly writing in English, and communicate Islamic ideas in a global context (Adibah & Chasanah, 2025).

Several relevant studies are related to this research. A study conducted by Endah Nur Latifah systematically reviewed the literature concerning competency standards, measurement methods, and the effectiveness of assessment instruments used to evaluate the pedagogical competence of PAI teachers. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

method was employed, drawing sources from ERIC, ScienceDirect, and DOAJ. Out of more than 450 articles, 12 were selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The analysis results indicate that the pedagogical competency standards of PAI teachers encompass planning, implementation, evaluation, and student development, all of which are influenced by religious values and local cultural contexts. Most measurement instruments, however, have not been able to optimally capture the affective dimension. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on assessing the pedagogical competence of PAI teachers based on values and contextual considerations, which has not been widely discussed in previous research. The study recommends the development of holistic assessment instruments that align with the characteristics of religious instruction (Latifah *et al.*, n.d.).

A study conducted by Firman aimed to identify the needs for Indonesian language teaching materials in Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. The research was carried out at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Palopo, involving students from the 2018 cohort of the Primary Madrasah Teacher Education study program who had completed the Indonesian language course in the previous semester. The study involved 84 students and 6 Indonesian language lecturers. This research employed a qualitative descriptive design using a survey method. Data collection instruments included questionnaires, observations, and interview guidelines. The data were analyzed descriptively using a qualitative approach. The findings indicate that both students and lecturers require teaching materials in the form of textbooks integrated with Islamic perspectives. The texts incorporated into the textbooks include Islamic historical texts, sermons or khutbah texts, quotations and translations of Qur'anic verses and Hadith, articles, and Islamic literary works. These findings may serve as a consideration in developing Indonesian language teaching materials within the context of IAIN Palopo and other Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia (Firman, 2022).

Muhammad Arif conducted a study aimed at investigating the competencies of Islamic Religious Education teachers most frequently discussed in research over the past decade, as well as the strategies for developing these competencies, including technological (digital) competence. To achieve this objective, the study employed a systematic literature review method by utilizing publication data spanning a ten-year period (2013–2023) to examine specific themes. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework was used to evaluate the findings. The study revealed that teachers are required to develop technological (digital) competence in addition to the four core teacher competencies: pedagogical, professional, personal, and social. The aforementioned condition is grounded in the need for collaborative, creative, and innovative learning, which is highly valued by students. Conversely, future research should seek to collect empirical data on approaches to fostering digital competence among Islamic Religious Education teachers, considering the prevailing shift toward student-centered learning in the twenty-first century as opposed to teacher-centered instruction (Arif *et al.*, 2025).

The absence of a comprehensive needs analysis may lead to a mismatch between the objectives of English language instruction and the actual needs of students. As a result, the learning process becomes less effective and fails to make a significant contribution to

enhancing the professional competence of prospective teachers. Needs analysis therefore constitutes a crucial step in designing an English language curriculum and instructional strategies that are relevant, contextual, and aligned with the graduate profile (Bocanegra-Valle, 2016).

Needs analysis serves not only to identify students' current levels of proficiency, but also to map out their target needs and learning needs. Through this approach, higher education institutions can determine which specific language competencies are genuinely required by prospective PAI teachers, whether in academic, professional, or social contexts. The results of such an analysis can subsequently serve as a foundation for developing syllabi, selecting instructional materials, determining appropriate teaching methods, and designing more targeted evaluation systems (Ahsan et al., 2019).

Strengthening English language competence among prospective PAI teachers also carries strategic implications for the global development of Islamic education (Kamal, 2025). Amid growing international attention to Islamic issues, the presence of PAI teachers who are capable of accessing and disseminating knowledge at the international level becomes increasingly important (Adilah et al., 2024). They can contribute to intercultural dialogue, enrich Islamic perspectives in global forums, and reinforce the image of Islamic education as moderate and of high quality.

It can be understood that English language competence for prospective PAI teachers is not merely a complementary component of the curriculum, but rather a strategic necessity directly related to the quality of graduates and the competitiveness of the institution. Therefore, research on the needs analysis of English language competence is highly relevant and urgently required. This study is expected to provide a clear depiction of the actual needs of PAI students, while also serving as a basis for recommendations in the development of policies and practices for English language instruction in Islamic higher education institutions.

2. Methods

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design to analyze the English language competency needs of prospective Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at Islamic Higher Education (Creswell, 2018). The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aimed to deeply understand the perceptions, experiences, and real needs of stakeholders related to English language proficiency in the academic and professional context of prospective PAI teachers. The research location is at STIT Aqidah Usymuni Sumenep, specifically in the PAI Department. The research subjects include PAI students, lecturers in charge of English and PAI courses, heads of Department, and alumni who have worked as PAI teachers. The informant selection technique used purposive sampling by considering their direct involvement in the learning process and professional practice (Walliman, 2021).

Data collection was conducted through in depth interviews, limited participatory observation of the learning process, and documentation studies of the curriculum, Semester Learning Plans (RPS), and academic policy documents related to graduate

competency standards. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore English language needs in pedagogical, academic, and professional aspects, including the need to read international literature, oral communication skills, and scientific writing. Observations were conducted to identify actual practices of English use in learning, while documentation was analyzed to determine the alignment between curriculum demands and field needs (Suharsimi, 2006).

Data analysis was conducted in stages through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing using an interactive analysis model. The data obtained were transcribed, coded, and then categorized into themes of English language competency needs, including academic needs (English for Academic Purposes), professional needs (English for Teaching and Religious Communication), and self development needs in the context of the globalization of Islamic education. Data validity was maintained through source and method triangulation techniques, member checking with informants, and peer discussions to ensure consistency of interpretation (Alem, 2020). With this approach, the research is expected to produce a comprehensive and contextual mapping of English language competency needs for prospective Islamic Religious Education teachers at PT KI.

3. Result

Based on the results of field observations and in depth interviews conducted with students, course lecturers, and program administrators, this study identified a number of English language competencies specifically required by prospective Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at Islamic Higher Education.

a. English Language Skills Proficiency

Prospective teachers of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) hold a strategic role in shaping students' character, morality, and religious understanding amid the dynamic developments of the modern era. In the context of globalization and the Industrial Revolution 4.0, which is characterized by the rapid flow of information and cross-border interconnectedness, proficiency in English has become no longer merely supplementary but essential. For prospective PAI teachers, English proficiency functions not only as a means of international communication but also as a professional instrument that supports self-improvement and enhances global competitiveness. This is in line with the statement of the Head of the PAI Study Program, Mrs. Misnatun, who stated that *"Currently, PAI students are also required to master English because almost all academic aspects use English."* PAI teachers who possess adequate English language competence will be better prepared to face the challenges of 21 century education, including technological integration, international collaboration, and the development of an inclusive and moderate understanding of Islam.

English language competence is considered highly relevant because it provides broader access to international literature, reputable journals, and various contemporary references on Islamic education, most of which are published in English. Many recent research findings in pedagogy, educational psychology, curriculum development, and modern Islamic studies are available in international journals. Without sufficient ability to

read and comprehend English texts, prospective PAI teachers will face limitations in enriching their academic perspectives. Conversely, with strong English proficiency, they can access up-to-date ideas, compare various approaches to Islamic education across different countries, and integrate best practices into the classroom learning process.

English language competence also supports continuous professional development. Prospective PAI teachers who are accustomed to reading international journals and participating in seminars or webinars conducted in English will develop broader perspectives and a more open mindset toward innovation and reform. This, in turn, contributes to improving the quality of instruction, making it more innovative, contextual, and responsive to students' needs. This is in line with what a PAI student named Muhit expressed. He stated that *"We need to master English in order to read references written in English"*. Thus, English proficiency is not merely a linguistic skill, but an integral part of efforts to build the professionalism of PAI teachers who are adaptive, competent, and capable of contributing to the development of Islamic education at both the national and international levels.

Specifically, English proficiency has become a crucial need for prospective PAI teachers. First, academic reading competence is identified as the most dominant requirement. Students stated that they frequently encounter difficulties in understanding international journal articles, reference books on Islamic education, and recent research findings, most of which are written in English. Limited academic vocabulary and unfamiliarity with Islamic terminology in English constitute major obstacles. Therefore, the ability to read critically and comprehend academic texts in English is a fundamental competence that needs to be strengthened so that prospective PAI teachers can broaden their academic insights and improve the quality of their scholarly work.

Second, academic writing competence also emerged as a significant finding in this study. Based on the interview results, students admitted that they lack confidence in writing abstracts, scientific articles, and academic assignments in English. Meanwhile, academic demands in Islamic Higher Education Institutions are increasingly oriented toward scientific publication and the production of scholarly work that meets international standards. Therefore, academic writing skills particularly those related to themes in Islamic education constitute a competence that needs to be systematically developed.

Third, speaking competence in academic and professional contexts was also identified as an important need. Observations revealed that students rarely use English in classroom presentations or discussions. However, interview findings indicated that they are aware of the importance of being able to explain fundamental Islamic concepts, the values of religious moderation, and PAI subject matter in English, particularly when engaging in international forums or broader educational environments. Therefore, oral communication skills that are contextualized within the field of PAI constitute one of the competencies that must be given serious attention.

Fourth, listening competence is also required to comprehend lectures, seminars, or online learning materials delivered in English that are related to Islamic studies and education. With the increasing access to international webinars and lectures, the ability to understand academic presentations in English has become an essential component of the professional needs of prospective PAI teachers.

b. English for Islamic Education Proficiency

The findings of this study indicate that the English language competency needs of prospective Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers cannot be adequately addressed solely through General English courses. Instead, they require the development of a more specific and contextualized program in the form of English for Islamic Education. This conclusion is based on a needs analysis which revealed a gap between the English materials currently taught and the academic as well as professional demands faced by prospective PAI teachers. This is in line with what a student named Yulistiana expressed. She stated that general English materials have not fully assisted them in understanding Islamic literature, Islamic pedagogical terminology, or the context of PAI instruction that is relevant to their field of expertise.

The study also found that the majority of respondents require mastery of specialized vocabulary and terminology related to Islamic studies and Islamic education, such as concepts of *aqidah* (Islamic creed), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), *akhlaq* (Islamic ethics), the history of Islamic civilization, as well as terms used in lesson planning and educational evaluation. In addition, students reported difficulties in understanding international scholarly articles discussing Islamic education, curriculum development in Islamic schools, and contemporary issues in Islamic pedagogy. These findings indicate that the development of English for Islamic Education is an urgent need, so that English instruction becomes more focused, practical, and aligned with the academic discipline of PAI.

The research findings indicate that prospective PAI teachers need the ability to present Islamic subject matter in English, both in academic forums and in broader global communication contexts. They also require skills in writing abstracts, scholarly articles, and PAI instructional materials in English. This need has become increasingly relevant with the growing opportunities for international collaboration, academic exchange programs, and publication in reputable journals, most of which use English as the medium of communication. Therefore, the development of English for Islamic Education should not merely focus on linguistic aspects, but should also integrate Islamic content with language skills in a comprehensive and cohesive manner.

The implication of these findings is the need to formulate a curriculum and instructional materials based on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) that are specifically designed for prospective PAI teachers at Islamic Higher Education Institutions. Such a program should include authentic materials, such as articles from international journals on Islamic education, examples of bilingual instructional materials, as well as practice in academic presentations and discussions within the context of Islamic studies. Thus, the

development of English for Islamic Education is expected to bridge the gap between academic demands and students' actual competencies, while simultaneously enhancing the professionalism and global competitiveness of PAI graduates.

c. English for Islamic Studies Proficiency

Based on the findings of the needs analysis conducted with prospective Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, it was revealed that the General English courses currently offered at Islamic Higher Education Institutions have not fully addressed the students' academic and professional needs. Research respondents, both through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, indicated that they require a model of English instruction that is more contextual and aligned with their specific field of study. Therefore, one of the principal findings of this study is the necessity to develop English for Islamic Studies as part of an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach tailored to the academic characteristics of PAI.

The research findings indicate that the majority of students experience difficulties when reading Islamic literature written in English, such as articles on Islamic education, Islamic pedagogy, Islamic law, and contemporary Islamic thought. These difficulties stem not only from language structure, but also from limited mastery of technical vocabulary and Islamic terminology in English. As a result, students demonstrate a relatively low ability to comprehend international references and make limited use of reputable journals as sources in their academic writing. This condition highlights a clear gap between the academic needs of prospective PAI teachers and the English materials that have been taught thus far.

This study also found that prospective PAI teachers require English competencies that support their future professional responsibilities, such as the ability to explain fundamental Islamic concepts in English, design bilingual instructional materials, and present Islamic Religious Education content in international academic forums. This need has become increasingly significant in line with the globalization of education and the expanding career opportunities available, including participation in student exchange programs, international conferences, and cross-border research collaborations.

The development of English for Islamic Studies is viewed as a strategic solution to bridge these needs. This program is expected not only to emphasize the four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing but also to systematically integrate Islamic content into the instructional materials. The materials may include Islamic vocabulary and terminology in English, analysis of academic texts on Islamic education, practice in writing abstracts and scholarly articles on Islamic themes, as well as simulations of presenting PAI materials in English. Through this approach, English instruction becomes more meaningful, practical, and aligned with the real needs of prospective PAI teachers.

The development of English for Islamic Studies is not merely a curricular innovation, but an urgent necessity to enhance the quality and professionalism of prospective PAI

teachers. With the support of a structured, needs-based curriculum, it is expected that PAI graduates will possess adequate English proficiency to access global discourse, contribute to the advancement of Islamic education, and compete academically and professionally at the international level.

4. Discussion

The analysis of English language competency needs for prospective teachers of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Islamic higher education institutions has become an increasingly relevant issue in the context of educational globalization and the advancement of internationally based knowledge (Dian et al., 2023). Islamic higher education institutions bear a strategic responsibility to prepare graduates who not only excel in mastering Islamic sciences but are also adaptive to the dynamics of global education. In this context, English proficiency is no longer viewed as a supplementary skill; rather, it is regarded as an essential professional supporting competence for prospective PAI teachers to access international literature, keep up with global curriculum developments, and participate in cross-border academic forums (Adilah et al., 2024).

Academically, the need for English language competence among prospective teachers of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) can be analyzed through the framework of objective needs (target needs) and subjective needs (learning needs) (Zein & Arifudin, 2025). From the perspective of objective needs, prospective PAI teachers are required to be able to read and comprehend scholarly sources in English, including international journals, reference books, and the latest research findings related to education, educational psychology, instructional methodology, and contemporary Islamic studies.

Many significant works on modern pedagogy, active learning approaches, and educational technology are published in English, therefore, limited language proficiency may become a barrier to professional development. Furthermore, global Islamic discourse developing in various countries is widely documented in English, and mastery of this language broadens the Islamic intellectual horizons of prospective PAI teachers within a more inclusive and comparative perspective (Sergeant & Erling, 2011).

From the perspective of subjective needs, prospective PAI teachers require English language instruction that is contextual and relevant to their field of study. General English courses are often insufficient to address the specific needs of PAI students. Therefore, the implementation of an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach becomes essential, with a focus on Islamic education terminology, academic vocabulary, and scientific presentation skills within religious contexts. The required competencies are not limited to reading skills alone but also encompass academic writing, speaking in scholarly forums, and listening comprehension of lectures or online courses delivered in English (Ludviana, 2025). Accordingly, the design of the English curriculum in PAI study programs should be developed based on a comprehensive needs analysis, rather than merely fulfilling formal curriculum requirements.

English language competence is also closely related to the demands of teacher professionalism in the digital era and the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (Wicagsono & Al, 2023). Prospective PAI teachers are expected to be able to utilize global learning resources, such as international journals, online learning platforms, and web-based international seminars. Many global educational platforms use English as the medium of instruction; therefore, language proficiency becomes a prerequisite for active participation. Furthermore, in the context of religious moderation and intercultural dialogue, PAI teachers who possess English proficiency can serve as agents of cultural and intellectual diplomacy, introducing the values of Islam as rahmatan lil 'alamin in international forums (Setiawan, 2026).

This needs analysis must also take into account the challenges faced by PAI students, such as diverse educational backgrounds, fluctuating motivation in learning English, and the perception that English is not a primary priority compared to core Islamic studies courses. Therefore, learning strategies should be designed in an integrative manner, for example by combining English language instruction with Islamic studies content, assigning presentations of international journal articles on Islamic education, or developing projects that involve writing summaries of English-language books relevant to PAI (Sidqurrahman, 2024). Through this approach, students do not merely learn the language as a linguistic system, but rather as a tool of academic communication that supports their professional competence.

At the institutional level, Islamic higher education institutions need to formulate minimum English language competency standards for PAI graduates, for example through standardized test score requirements or specific language certifications (Assegaf et al., 2022). However, beyond mere test scores, what is truly needed is functional proficiency that can be applied in real contexts of teaching practice and professional development. Institutional support through lecturer training, the provision of ESP based teaching materials, and the integration of educational technology becomes a key factor in the success of this program.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of English language competency needs for prospective PAI teachers in Islamic higher education institutions demonstrates that language is not merely a means of communication, but a strategic instrument for building professionalism, expanding academic insight, and enhancing graduates' competitiveness at both national and international levels. Efforts to strengthen English proficiency must be designed systematically, contextually, and sustainably in order to align with the vision of Islamic education that is adaptive, moderate, and globally oriented.

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