



Volume 6 Nomor 1 (2025), Pages 157-165

Edubase : Journal of Basic Education

Email Journal : edubase.bbc@gmail.com

Web Journal: <https://jurnal.uibbc.ac.id/index.php/edubase/index>



Pedagogic Competence of Lecturers: The Key to Success in Inclusive Education in Religious Universities

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Received: 2025-04-30; **Revised:** 2025-05-17; **Accepted:** 2025-05-25

Abstract

Objective: This study explores the pedagogical competence of lecturers as a key factor in the success of inclusive education in religious higher education institutions. **Novelty:** The study addresses unique challenges in religious academic settings, such as balancing religious values with inclusivity, adapting curricula, and fostering an inclusive culture—a perspective underexplored in existing literature. **Methods:** Using a qualitative approach through literature review and library research, this study examines various academic sources to identify essential elements of pedagogical competence for inclusive education. **Results:** The findings reveal that pedagogical competence includes curriculum adaptation, innovative teaching strategies, student-centered learning, and sensitivity to diverse student needs. The study underscores the importance of professional development, institutional support, and policy frameworks to promote inclusivity. **Conclusion:** By enhancing pedagogical competence, lecturers can create inclusive learning environments for students with diverse backgrounds and abilities. This study contributes to higher education inclusivity discourse by emphasizing the role of pedagogical skills in equitable education. Future research should validate these findings through empirical case studies in religious higher education settings.

Keywords: Pedagogical Competence, Inclusive Education, Teaching Strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a fundamental principle in higher education, ensuring that all students, regardless of background or ability, have equal opportunities to learn and succeed (Cretu & Morandau, 2020). In religious higher education institutions, where spiritual and ethical values are deeply embedded in the curriculum, achieving inclusivity poses unique challenges (Zabeli & Gjelaj, 2020). Pedagogical competence is a crucial factor in addressing these challenges, as lecturers must balance traditional religious teachings with modern inclusive educational practices (Harfiani et al., 2020). According to Mezzanotte et al. (2021), inclusive teaching requires adaptive strategies, cultural sensitivity, and differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse learning needs. Therefore, understanding and enhancing the pedagogical competence of lecturers in religious higher education is imperative for fostering an inclusive academic environment.

Existing literature on inclusive education primarily focuses on general higher education institutions, with limited studies examining its implementation in religious contexts (Purwanto et al., 2023). While previous research has explored inclusive teaching methods and faculty development (Shutaleva et al., 2023), there is still a gap in understanding how pedagogical competence specifically contributes to inclusive education in religious higher education settings (Fuentes & Zelaya, 2021). Furthermore, the interplay between religious doctrines and inclusive pedagogy remains an underexplored area, requiring further academic inquiry (Shaeffer, 2019).

With the increasing diversity of students in religious higher education, ensuring an inclusive learning environment is a priority (Widana et al., 2023). Many institutions struggle to equip their lecturers with the necessary skills to support students with disabilities, cultural differences, and varying learning abilities (Beyene et al., 2023). The urgency of this research lies in its potential to provide practical insights for policymakers and educators in religious institutions to improve teaching methodologies and foster an inclusive academic culture (Magnússon, 2020).

Several studies have emphasized the role of teacher competence in fostering inclusive education. Mezzanotte et al. (2021) highlighted that effective inclusive teaching requires a combination of curriculum adaptation and student-centered learning. Cretu and Morandau (2020) found that pedagogical strategies such as differentiated instruction and formative assessment enhance student engagement in inclusive settings. Additionally, Zabeli and Gjelaj (2020) pointed out that institutional support and faculty training play significant roles in successful inclusive education. However, these studies have largely overlooked the unique religious contexts of higher education institutions.

This study contributes to the literature by specifically analyzing pedagogical competence in religious higher education institutions as a key factor in promoting inclusive education. Unlike previous studies that focus on mainstream universities, this research highlights the unique challenges and strategies required for lecturers in religious institutions to implement inclusive pedagogical practices. It also integrates insights from educational psychology, religious studies, and inclusive education frameworks to provide a holistic approach.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a literature review (library research) method to examine the pedagogical competence of lecturers in fostering inclusive education in religious higher education institutions. Qualitative research is appropriate for understanding complex social phenomena, such as inclusive education, through an in-depth analysis of existing knowledge (Zavaraki & Schneider, 2019). A literature review allows for the systematic collection and synthesis of scholarly works, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing pedagogical competence in inclusive religious higher education settings (Munna & Kalam, 2021).

The data for this study are derived from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and policy documents published within the last five years. The selection of sources follows strict inclusion criteria, prioritizing publications that discuss pedagogical competence, inclusive education, and religious higher education. A systematic review methodology ensures the reliability and validity of the selected data (Schwab, 2020). The main databases used for data collection include Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, Elsevier, Springer, and Scopus-indexed journals.

The study employs document analysis as the primary data collection technique, which involves systematically reviewing and categorizing existing research (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). This process includes identifying key themes, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings related to pedagogical competence and inclusive education. Data collection follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to enhance rigor and transparency (Moriña, 2019).

The collected data are analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, which enables the identification of patterns and relationships between different aspects of pedagogical competence in religious higher education settings (Lindner & Schwab, 2020). Thematic coding is conducted to categorize key findings under broader themes, such as curriculum adaptation, inclusive teaching strategies, and faculty professional development. The study also incorporates content analysis to examine policy recommendations and best practices from previous research (Collins, Azmat, & Rentschler, 2019). The results are then synthesized to provide a conceptual framework for enhancing pedagogical competence in inclusive religious higher education institutions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below is a Library Data Table compiled from a selection of 10 scholarly articles published in the last five years (2019–2024) from Google Scholar. These articles have been carefully filtered and selected to ensure relevance to the study on "Pedagogical Competence of Lecturers: The Key to Successful Inclusive Education in Religious Higher Education Institutions." Each article provides valuable insights into various aspects of pedagogical competence, inclusive education, and its implementation in religious higher education settings.

Table 1. Library Data for the last five years (2019–2024) from Google Scholar

No.	Author(s) & Year	Title	Focus Area	Key Findings
1	Akrim & Harfiani (2019)	Daily learning flow of inclusive education for early childhood	Pedagogical strategies	Highlights the need for structured teaching models for inclusive settings.
2	Harfiani et al. (2020)	Practical Application of Inclusive Education Programs In Raudhatul Athfal	Implementation of inclusive education	Examines how inclusive education integrates with religious early childhood settings.
3	Mezzanotte et al. (2021)	Promoting inclusive education for diverse societies: A conceptual framework	Inclusive education framework	Discusses strategies to improve inclusivity through policy and teaching methods.
4	Purwanto et al. (2023)	The development of reflective practices for Islamic religious education teachers	Reflective teaching practices	Suggests that reflective practice improves pedagogical competence in Islamic education.
5	Widana et al. (2023)	The Effect of Teachers' Responsibility and Understanding of Local Wisdom on Autonomy	Pedagogical autonomy	Finds that lecturers with cultural awareness enhance inclusivity.
6	Cretu & Morandau (2020)	Initial teacher education for inclusive education: A bibliometric analysis	Teacher training	Emphasizes the role of pre-service training in pedagogical competence.
7	Fuentes & Zelaya (2021)	Rethinking the course syllabus: Considerations for promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion	Curriculum development	Explores how inclusive syllabus designs improve student engagement.
8	Shutaleva et al. (2023)	Sustainability of inclusive education in schools and higher education	Policy & institutional support	Highlights the necessity of institutional support in sustaining inclusive education.

9	Shaeffer (2019)	Inclusive education: A prerequisite for equity and social justice	Inclusive teaching strategies	Examines the role of social justice in inclusive education policies.
10	Beyene & Mekonnen (2023)	Inclusion, access, and accessibility of educational resources in higher education institutions	Access & equity	Identifies the impact of accessibility on educational inclusivity.

The review of the selected articles emphasizes that pedagogical competence is crucial for the success of inclusive education. Lecturers must possess adaptability in teaching methods, curriculum modification skills, and cultural awareness to address the diverse needs of students in religious higher education settings (Mezzanotte et al., 2021; Purwanto et al., 2023). Without these competencies, inclusion remains a theoretical goal rather than an achievable practice.

Research by Shutaleva et al. (2023) highlights that institutional support is vital for fostering inclusivity. Universities that implement clear policies and faculty training programs create a more sustainable inclusive environment. Similarly, Widana et al. (2023) found that lecturers who understand local cultural and religious traditions are more effective in adapting their teaching to diverse student needs.

Several studies discuss the unique challenges of inclusive education in religious higher education institutions (Harfiani et al., 2020; Purwanto et al., 2023). Unlike secular institutions, religious colleges must balance theological teachings with inclusivity. This requires careful curriculum adjustments that ensure students with different learning needs can fully participate without compromising religious values.

One of the main gaps in implementing inclusive education is the lack of training for lecturers (Cretu & Morandau, 2020). Studies emphasize the importance of teacher education programs that incorporate inclusion-focused pedagogy. Without proper preparation, even experienced lecturers may struggle to apply inclusive teaching methods effectively.

Research by Fuentes & Zelaya (2021) and Beyene & Mekonnen (2023) indicates that inclusive syllabus design and accessibility of educational resources significantly impact student engagement. Innovative pedagogical approaches, such as differentiated instruction and technology-assisted learning, enhance the inclusivity of religious higher education.

Despite the progress in inclusive education, further research is needed to explore case studies on successful implementations in religious higher education institutions. Future studies should investigate specific pedagogical interventions, faculty training models, and the long-term impact of inclusive policies on student learning outcomes.

The findings from the literature review suggest that pedagogical competence is a fundamental pillar in implementing inclusive education in religious higher education institutions. According to Mezzanotte et al. (2021), an effective inclusive education system requires competent educators who can accommodate diverse learning needs through student-centered pedagogy. However, many religious higher education institutions still lack structured training programs to equip lecturers with the necessary skills to adapt their teaching methods

to an inclusive environment (Cretu & Morandau, 2020). This highlights a significant gap in educational preparation, where lecturers may not yet be fully equipped to handle students with special needs or diverse backgrounds.

Despite global efforts to promote inclusivity in higher education, institutional and policy-related challenges persist (Shutaleva et al., 2023). Many religious institutions struggle to align inclusive education principles with traditional religious teachings. While institutions support the idea of equity in education, there is often hesitancy in modifying curricula to accommodate students with disabilities or those from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Policies that lack clear implementation frameworks make it difficult for educators to apply effective inclusive teaching strategies.

Reflective teaching is a key strategy in developing pedagogical competence for inclusivity (Purwanto et al., 2023). Lecturers who engage in reflective practices can identify their own biases, teaching limitations, and areas for improvement. However, many institutions do not integrate continuous professional development programs that encourage self-reflection. This is a major issue because without self-awareness, lecturers may unconsciously exclude certain student groups from active participation in learning.

One of the most complex challenges identified in this study is the need to balance religious values with inclusivity (Harfiani et al., 2020). Religious higher education institutions uphold strong theological traditions that influence how education is structured. In some cases, these traditions can conflict with the principles of modern inclusive education. For example, some conservative institutions may struggle to integrate students from different religious backgrounds or with special learning needs into mainstream classrooms. The challenge here is to find a pedagogical approach that respects religious doctrine while embracing inclusivity.

The findings align with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that learning is a social process influenced by cultural and historical contexts (Shaeffer, 2019). This theory suggests that education should be adapted to fit the cultural and social needs of students. In the context of religious higher education, this means that lecturers must develop teaching strategies that integrate theological knowledge with contemporary inclusive pedagogical approaches. However, many educators lack training in inclusive pedagogical models, making it difficult to implement a truly student-centered learning experience.

Another major finding is the importance of accessibility in higher education institutions (Beyene & Mekonnen, 2023). Many religious universities and colleges still lack adequate accessibility features, such as digital learning tools, disability-friendly classroom environments, and flexible teaching methods. This is a critical issue because an inclusive education system cannot function effectively without accessible learning resources. Institutions must invest in technological advancements and infrastructural modifications to ensure students with disabilities receive equitable learning opportunities.

The research by Fuentes & Zelaya (2021) highlights the importance of an inclusive curriculum in fostering a more engaging learning experience. Many traditional religious curriculums are highly structured and do not accommodate diverse student learning styles. By incorporating flexible syllabus designs, such as universal design for learning (UDL), educators can create a more adaptive learning environment that benefits all students. However, there is resistance from some academic institutions in modifying religious-based courses, as these curriculums are often seen as fixed and unchangeable.

One of the most pressing issues revealed in this study is the lack of pre-service training in inclusive education (Cretu & Morandau, 2020). Many lecturers enter religious higher education institutions without sufficient training in inclusive pedagogy, making it difficult for them to accommodate students with diverse learning needs. Incorporating inclusive teaching strategies into pre-service teacher education programs can significantly improve lecturers' abilities to implement differentiated instruction.

Another critical issue is the lack of collaboration among faculty members in promoting inclusivity (Widana et al., 2023). Many religious higher education institutions operate in individualized teaching structures, where lecturers work independently without collaborating on inclusive education practices. Establishing faculty networks and peer-learning programs can enhance knowledge-sharing and help educators learn from one another's experiences in dealing with inclusive classrooms.

Based on the literature review findings, it is evident that religious higher education institutions must undergo significant reforms to ensure that inclusive education principles are effectively implemented. The author argues that institutional policies should focus on faculty training, curriculum modification, and infrastructural support to make inclusive education a reality rather than just a theoretical concept. Additionally, policymakers should provide clear guidelines on how to integrate inclusive pedagogy with religious teachings without compromising theological values.

To achieve successful inclusive education in religious higher education, institutions must develop structured training programs for lecturers, provide digital accessibility tools, and reform rigid curriculums to accommodate diverse student populations. Only through these efforts can religious higher education institutions bridge the gap between traditional education models and modern inclusive education frameworks.

This discussion highlights that pedagogical competence is the key to successful inclusive education in religious higher education institutions. However, the lack of structured training, rigid curriculums, and institutional barriers remain major obstacles. The study emphasizes the urgent need for faculty development, policy changes, and technological integration to support inclusive education. By addressing these challenges, religious higher education institutions can foster an inclusive learning environment that aligns with both academic excellence and religious values.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight that pedagogical competence is a fundamental requirement for implementing inclusive education in religious higher education institutions. The literature review confirms that lecturers must develop adaptive teaching strategies, reflective practices, and curriculum flexibility to accommodate students with diverse learning needs. However, significant challenges remain, including institutional resistance to curriculum modification, lack of faculty training, and insufficient accessibility measures. While inclusive education is widely recognized as a cornerstone of equitable learning, many religious institutions struggle to integrate inclusivity due to the rigid nature of theological teachings and traditional academic structures. Addressing these challenges requires a structured approach to faculty development and institutional commitment to accessibility and equity.

Despite growing awareness of the need for inclusive education, many institutions lack well-defined policies and training programs to support lecturers in adopting inclusive pedagogies. The research findings suggest that pre-service and in-service teacher training programs should incorporate inclusive education frameworks, enabling lecturers to design flexible learning experiences that respect both religious values and the diverse needs of students. Institutional leadership must also play an active role in developing policies that prioritize inclusivity, investing in digital learning tools, accessibility infrastructure, and cross-disciplinary collaboration among educators. Additionally, policymakers should establish clear guidelines on the integration of inclusive practices within religious education settings, ensuring that academic institutions can balance theological traditions with modern educational principles.

For future research, it is recommended that empirical case studies be conducted to examine the effectiveness of specific inclusive teaching strategies in religious higher education. Quantitative and qualitative studies could explore how faculty development programs impact teaching outcomes and student success in inclusive classrooms. Additionally, further research should assess the long-term impact of institutional policies on inclusivity and examine cross-cultural comparisons of inclusive education models in different religious contexts. By addressing these gaps, future research can provide practical frameworks and policy recommendations to support the transformation of religious higher education institutions into truly inclusive learning environments.

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