

Assessing Student Learning Needs to Achieve Competency Outcomes in the Master's Program of Early Childhood Islamic Education

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ABSTRACT

The Early Childhood Islamic Education Masters program at Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu State Islamic University aims to lead in Early Childhood Education, fostering pious, moderate, and intelligent young learners across Southeast Asia by 2037. Aligning the program's curriculum with these objectives requires a detailed learning needs assessment. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using Milles and Huberman's interactive analysis model. Data was gathered through field and library research, focusing on curriculum documents and learning needs from students at UIN Saepuddin Zuhri Purwokerto and UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu. Analysis of field data revealed specific learning requirements aligned with the desired graduate profile, emphasizing competencies in religious moderation, pedagogical skills, and early childhood development strategies. These findings provide essential insights for program managers to refine the curriculum, ensuring it meets the professional standards necessary for graduates to excel in Early Childhood Islamic Education. By aligning curriculum development with assessed learning needs, the program can better prepare students to achieve its mission of cultivating well-rounded educators who meet the goals set for 2037.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Graduate competency standards, also referred to as program outcomes in the Master of Early Childhood Islamic Education, provide a concrete representation of the program's vision and mission. These competencies aim to produce graduates who excel in the domain of early childhood Islamic education, emphasizing both theoretical knowledge and practical application (Hamidah et al., 2021; Yusuf & Abdul, 2020). However, achieving this vision requires more than the traditional four semesters of primarily theoretical coursework; rather, it necessitates a curriculum that effectively integrates practical learning to meet the evolving needs of students and the professional demands they will encounter post-graduation (Amali et al., 2022). The current curriculum design often falls short in addressing the specific competency levels expected of graduates, especially in preparing them for roles as lecturers and teachers who can navigate both pedagogical and religious educational goals. To bridge this gap, it is essential to enhance the curriculum with targeted learning materials and instructional

models that foster relevant competencies aligned with professional expectations in early childhood Islamic education (Basri et al., 2021).

The structured distribution of output competencies forms the foundation for identifying and addressing the learning needs of master's program students. It is essential to prioritize these learning needs to cultivate graduates with domain-specific competencies aligned with the program's objectives. Supporting the program's mission—focusing on education, research, and community service—is instrumental in shaping an effective learning program (Yusuf & Hadi, 2021). The mission of the Master's program in Early Childhood Islamic Education is derived from its vision: to provide high-quality education, conduct impactful research, engage in community service, and establish partnerships with both national and international institutions focused on early childhood education. Realizing this vision through an aligned mission necessitates a curriculum that immerses students in professional discourses and practices as specialists in early childhood education (Amali et al., 2022). Furthermore, according to Indonesia's Teacher and Lecturer Law (UURI Number 14 of 2005, Articles 10 and 8), teacher and lecturer competencies are defined in four areas—pedagogic, personal, social, and professional. These competencies, acquired through rigorous professional education, set a clear benchmark for the skills and knowledge essential for educators (Hidayat et al., 2020).

The rapid development of early childhood education, particularly within the context of Islamic education, underscores the need for well-prepared educators equipped with comprehensive competencies. Graduate competency standards are essential for preparing students to meet the demands of their professional roles, especially in contexts requiring both educational and religious expertise (Hamidah et al., 2021). This research examines the specific learning needs of students in the Master's program in Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) to better align the curriculum with the competency expectations for graduates. Current curricula often lack sufficient emphasis on practical skills and professional preparedness, creating a gap between the theoretical knowledge imparted and the professional competencies expected in the field. Addressing this gap through a needs assessment can guide curriculum refinement to ensure students are prepared for real-world challenges in early childhood Islamic education.

This study's novelty lies in its focus on assessing students' learning needs across three core areas: classroom learning, research, and community service. These areas are integral to achieving the desired graduate competency standards, characterized by knowledge, attitudes, and skills. This comprehensive needs assessment provides unique insights into students' preparation requirements, aiming to refine the curriculum to foster well-rounded graduates capable of integrating Islamic values with pedagogical expertise. Drawing on Leslie Rae's (1990) theory of needs analysis as foundational, this study underscores that effective education begins with recognizing and addressing specific educational needs, thus bridging the gap between current competency levels and those expected at graduation.

The theoretical framework for this study integrates key theories on competency and needs analysis, including Rae's (1990) emphasis on education's alignment with needs analysis, Paul Friedman and Elaine Yarbrough's (1985) view on learning as a means to close the gap between actual and expected competencies, and Malcolm Knowles' (2020) perspective on educational needs as central to organizational and societal demands. Competency is further explored through Marrelli et al.'s (2005) view of it as a blend of knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for professional effectiveness, and Gordon's (1998) model highlighting six core competency aspects—knowledge, understanding, skill, values, attitudes, and interest—as determinants of professional success. These perspectives underpin this study's goal of structuring a curriculum that nurtures students' competence across personal, professional, and social dimensions as outlined in Indonesia's educational regulations (UURI No. 14 of 2005).

The objective of this research is to assess the specific learning needs of Master's students in the Early Childhood Islamic Education program, providing actionable insights into curriculum development that meets competency standards. The study addresses the following research questions: (1) What are the specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for graduates to excel in early

childhood Islamic education? (2) How can learning needs in the domains of education, research, and community service be identified and incorporated into the curriculum? (3) What adjustments to the current curriculum are required to achieve alignment with national standards for teacher and lecturer competencies? By answering these questions, the study seeks to refine educational programs in a manner that supports graduates' success in both local and global contexts.

2. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, combining field research and library research to gain a comprehensive understanding of the learning needs in the Master's program in Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD). Field research includes direct observations, structured interviews, and primary data collection, while library research involves examining secondary data sources, such as academic literature, policy documents, and relevant curriculum materials. This dual approach allows for a detailed investigation into both the theoretical foundations and the practical implementations of the PIAUD program.

Data collection was conducted through a range of instruments, including structured observation and interview guides, designed to ensure consistency across data sources. Observations took place in classrooms and administrative offices, enabling an in-depth look at both instructional and programmatic aspects of the PIAUD curriculum. Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, such as the heads of the PIAUD Master's programs at UIN K.H. Saefuddin Zuhri Purwokerto and UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, and with a purposive sample of approximately 20 students actively engaged in these programs. These participants were selected for their direct involvement and capacity to provide rich insights into the curriculum's alignment with graduate competency standards. Secondary data sources, including academic records, curriculum frameworks, and other documentation, supplemented the field data to provide a broader context.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model, encompassing four key stages: (1) data collection, (2) data reduction, where extraneous information is systematically filtered to retain only relevant data, (3) data display, which involves organizing data visually in tables or charts to enhance interpretability, and (4) conclusion drawing and verification, where findings are analyzed and cross-verified to ensure robustness. To strengthen the validity of findings, methodological triangulation was employed, comparing data from observations, interviews, and documentation to identify patterns and discrepancies. This triangulation, combined with thick, descriptive context, enhances the study's transferability, allowing findings to be applicable in similar educational settings.

To ensure the reliability and objectivity of the research, several quality control measures were implemented. Dependability was maintained by systematically documenting all research procedures and decisions. Confirmability was supported through rigorous audit trails and regular peer debriefing, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Additionally, efforts were made to ensure credibility by member-checking interview summaries with participants and refining interpretations based on their feedback. This methodological rigor, coupled with purposive sampling of directly involved stakeholders, provides a robust foundation for understanding the learning needs in the PIAUD Master's program and guides future curriculum development.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the research have to be supported by sufficient data. The research results and the discovery must be the answers, or the research hypothesis stated previously in the introduction part.

3. 1. Master Study Program of PIAUD UIN K.H.Saefuddin Zuhri Purwokerto

The Master of Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) Study Program at K.H. Saefuddin Zuhri Purwokerto State Islamic University, officially established in November 2021 by the decision of the Minister of Religion, is grounded in a clear vision, mission, and objectives. The program envisions, by the year 2040, becoming a superior, progressive, and integrative study program that advances the science of early childhood Islamic education within the ASEAN region.

The mission of the PIAUD program is multifaceted. It aims to provide high-quality, integrative education that fosters professional educators and experts in early childhood Islamic education. The program emphasizes conducting comprehensive research to address and solve issues pertinent to early childhood Islamic education, thereby contributing to its quality enhancement. Additionally, the program seeks to forge partnerships with both domestic and international institutions, as well as with community stakeholders, to bolster early childhood Islamic education standards. Community service is also a key focus, aiming to support and develop early childhood Islamic education practices. The governance of the study program aspires to align with national and international standards, establishing a benchmark for institutional excellence.

The objectives of the PIAUD program are designed to produce educators and managers who are skilled, creative, and professional in the field of early childhood Islamic education. It also prioritizes research that is innovative, integrative, and contributes to scientific advancement within early childhood education. The program is committed to community service and empowerment activities rooted in Islamic values, fostering a foundation for effective early childhood education. Moreover, the program seeks to establish sustainable and productive collaborations with other institutions, alongside implementing professional governance standards that meet both national and international expectations.

Graduates of the PIAUD Master's program are equipped to excel in various roles. As academics, graduates are prepared to serve as educators—either as lecturers or teachers—with expertise, creativity, and professionalism in early childhood Islamic education. As researchers, graduates are skilled in planning, executing, publishing, and managing research that reflects the latest advancements, guided by Islamic principles, ethics, and scholarly rigor. Graduates may also become consultants, adept at analyzing and addressing challenges in early childhood Islamic education through the lens of Islamic teachings and professional expertise. Additionally, they are qualified to assume managerial roles in early childhood education institutions, bringing leadership and organizational skills to the administration of these educational settings.

The special characteristic (distinctiveness) of the curriculum of the Postgraduate Master of Education Study Program of UIN Prof. K. H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto is the development of early childhood education science based on: (1) integration between Islam and the science of early childhood Islamic education; (2) scientific development based on literacy; and (3) scientific development with locality insight. The formulation of learning outcomes for the Postgraduate Master of Early Childhood Islamic Education Study Program at UIN Prof. K. H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto is prepared based on the profile of graduates to be achieved by elaborating on the vision, mission, and objectives of the institution, and contextualizing according to the needs of the community. The formulation of learning outcomes refers to: (1) Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 3 of 2020 concerning National Higher Education Standards in the Appendix of the Formulation of General Attitudes and Skills; (2) Graduate Competency Standards (SKL) and Graduate Learning Outcomes (CPL) for Masters and Doctoral Level Study Programs at Islamic Religious Universities and the Faculty of Islamic Religion in Higher Education; (3) Independent Campus Learning Curriculum developed by UIN Prof. K. H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto; and (3) Statute of UIN Prof. K. H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto (Pendidikan et al., 2023) (Riset, 2016). The formulation of learning outcomes from the aspects of attitude, knowledge, general skills, and specific skills is as follows;

Table 1. Learning Outcomes of PIAUD Master Study Program of UIN Prof. K. H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto

No.	Learning Outcomes (CP)
I.	Attitude Aspect
I.1.	Pious to God Almighty and able to show a religious attitude.
I.2.	Uphold human values in carrying out duties based on religion, morals, and ethics.
I.3.	Contribute to improving the quality of life in society, nation, state, and advancement of civilization based on Pancasila.
I.4.	Play a role as a citizen who is proud and loves the country, has nationalism and a sense of responsibility to the state and nation.
I.5.	Respect the diversity of cultures, views, religions and beliefs, as well as the original opinions or findings of others.
I.6.	Work together and have social sensitivity and concern for the community and environment.
I.7.	Law-abiding and disciplined in social and state life.
I.8.	Internalize academic values, norms and ethics.
I.9.	Demonstrate an attitude of responsibility for work in their field of expertise independently; and
I.10.	Internalize the spirit of independence, struggle, and entrepreneurship.
II.	Knowledge Aspect
2.1	Mastering and developing learning and learning theories of Early Childhood Islamic Education through an inter or multidisciplinary approach.
2.2	Mastering the theory and its application in developing media and learning resources for Early Childhood Islamic Education based on technology, information and communication.
2.3	Mastering the theory of Early Childhood Islamic Education curriculum development.
2.4	Mastering the theory and its application in evaluating Early Childhood Islamic Education learning.
2.5	Master and develop developmental theories and characteristics of students.
2.6	Develop a theory of inclusive education in early childhood education.
2.7	Develop a variety of research in the field of Early Childhood Islamic Education based on an inter or multidisciplinary approach.
III	General Skill Aspects
3.1	Able to develop logical, critical, systematic, and creative thinking through scientific research, creation of designs or works of art in the field of science and technology that pay attention to and apply humanities values in accordance with their field of expertise, compile scientific conceptions and study results based on scientific rules, procedures, and ethics in the form of a thesis or other equivalent form, and uploaded on the college website, as well as papers that have been published in accredited scientific journals or accepted in international journals.
3.2	Able to conduct academic validation or studies according to their field of expertise in solving problems in society or relevant industries through the development of their knowledge and expertise.
3.3	Able to compile ideas, thoughts, and scientific arguments responsibly and based on academic ethics, and communicate them through the media to the academic community and the wider community.
3.4	Able to identify the scientific field that is the object of his research and position it into a research map developed through an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach.
3.5	Able to make decisions in the context of solving problems in the development of science and technology that pay attention to and apply humanities values based on analytical or experimental studies of information and data.
3.6	Able to manage, develop and maintain networks with colleagues, peers within the institution and the wider research community.
3.7	Able to increase learning capacity independently; and
3.8	Able to document, store, secure, and retrieve research data in order to ensure validity and prevent plagiarism.

IV.	Specific Skill Aspects
4.1	Apply educational theory and application to Early Childhood Islamic Education.
4.2	Identify and design learning management in early childhood education.
4.3	Designing and developing Early Childhood Islamic Education learning tools.
4.4	Resolving Early Childhood Islamic Education problems based on science and technology.
4.5	Manage and lead research activities in the field of Early Childhood Islamic Education and publish them in accredited national journals.

The curriculum for the Master of Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) Study Program at the Postgraduate UIN Prof. K. H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto is carefully designed to align with both the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) and the Merdeka Belajar framework. This curriculum is tailored to meet the unique characteristics and objectives of the PIAUD Master's Program, integrating specialized content, methods, and materials that serve as foundational elements for effective learning activities (Santoso, 2015). By embracing a KKNI-based curriculum and incorporating Merdeka Belajar principles, this program aims to fulfill the overarching vision, mission, and objectives of UIN Prof. K. H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto's postgraduate education in early childhood Islamic studies (Baharuddin, 2021).

The curriculum of the Master of Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) Study Program at UIN Prof. K. H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto integrates a unique blend of frameworks, combining four essential paradigms: (1) the KKNI-based curriculum in alignment with Permendikbud No. 3 of 2020 on National Higher Education Standards; (2) the Merdeka Belajar curriculum supporting independent campus learning; (3) the university's statute, which guides the implementation of the institution's vision, mission, and objectives; and (4) the program's focus on scientific development, emphasizing Islamic principles and local values. Together, these foundations shape the curriculum to promote the scientific and educational goals of the PIAUD Master's Program, aligning with both KKNI and Merdeka Belajar standards.

The distinctiveness of the PIAUD curriculum is determined through an in-depth analysis of real-world needs, institutional vision and mission, and a comparative review of similar programs at other institutions (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, 2021). This process ensures that the curriculum reflects the institution's values while meeting community needs and the specific characteristics of early childhood Islamic education. From this analysis, the curriculum can be tailored to embody the institution's vision and mission while showcasing a unique approach suitable for the study program's aims.

The curriculum for the Master of Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) program at UIN Prof. K. H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto is designed around two distinct patterns: (1) a curriculum emphasizing general early childhood education principles and (2) an integrated curriculum that merges Islamic values with scientific knowledge specific to early childhood education. These dual approaches are crafted to align with the institution's mission and the community's expectations, ensuring that PIAUD graduates possess relevant, community-focused competencies that reflect both educational expertise and Islamic values (Jamal, 2021).

In this framework, the PIAUD Master's program advances a curriculum uniquely positioned around the integration of Islam and science, grounded in local cultural values. This curriculum reflects a paradigm that emphasizes the interconnection of Islamic and scientific knowledge contextualized to local cultural and value systems. The institution's vision and mission promote an approach where Islamic principles and scientific methods synergize, enhancing early childhood education practices tailored to the specific context of the learning community. By embedding local cultural values, the PIAUD program addresses community needs while promoting the harmonious development of Islamic and scientific knowledge within early childhood education.

The strengths of the PIAUD curriculum are defined by three core aspects: (1) the integration of Islamic and scientific knowledge contextualized to local culture, which enhances the program's scientific depth; (2) the inclusion of three dimensions—science, Islamic principles, and local culture—within learning outcomes, creating a distinctive educational approach that synthesizes these elements; and (3) the structure of the curriculum, which follows the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) and Merdeka Belajar principles, integrating Islamic teachings with scientific concepts grounded in local cultural relevance (Dutta et al., 2022). This distinctive approach ensures that the PIAUD Master's program not only aligns with the institution's mission but also stands out among other programs for its ability to cultivate knowledge and competencies directly suited to community needs (Ayuningrum & Nopiana, 2019; Mondal et al., 2024).

The PIAUD curriculum is structured to support comprehensive graduate competency standards and outcomes based on the institution's vision, mission, and program uniqueness. The program requires a total of 56 credits, divided as follows: Basic Courses (4 credits), Main and Supporting Courses (28 credits), Elective Courses (6 credits), Research and Thesis (14 credits), and Matriculation (4 credits) (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, 2021; Elyana & Das, 2022). This structure ensures that PIAUD graduates are not only well-versed in Islamic and scientific knowledge but are also equipped with the skills to address specific community and educational needs effectively.

3. 2. PIAUD Master Study Program at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu

The Master's Program in Early Childhood Islamic Education at UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu, established under Permit No. 2523 in 2015, is guided by a vision to excel in early childhood Islamic education. By 2037, the program aims to lead in nurturing pious, moderate, and intelligent young learners across Southeast Asia, rooted in a strong sense of national identity. This vision is supported by a multi-faceted mission that underscores the commitment to quality education, research, community service, and institutional collaboration.

The program's mission includes delivering high-quality education that produces graduates with advanced expertise in early childhood Islamic education. To support the development of the field, the program promotes integrated research activities across local, national, and international levels, ensuring that students engage with diverse perspectives and challenges. The program also emphasizes community service initiatives aimed at empowering early childhood Islamic education institutions, fostering the growth of creative and innovative approaches to Islamic education. Additionally, the program seeks to establish cooperative networks with universities and educational institutions to advance the study of Islamic early childhood education in various contexts, from local to international.

Graduates of the program are prepared for various professional roles. The primary profiles include positions such as Master Educators who can advance the field of Early Childhood Islamic Education, researchers dedicated to exploring the complexities within this field, and teaching staff equipped with a comprehensive understanding of early childhood Islamic pedagogy. Beyond these core roles, graduates can also pursue additional profiles, such as sociologists and counselors specializing in Islamic early childhood education, managers of early childhood Islamic educational institutions, designers of educational programs, and journalists focusing on early childhood education topics.

Other possible career paths for graduates include becoming trainers in Islamic early childhood education, where they can provide specialized training and development, or educators directly working with young children in early childhood settings. This diverse range of graduate profiles reflects the program's commitment to equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed to make meaningful contributions across multiple dimensions of early childhood Islamic education.

Table 2. Mapping of Competencies of Graduates of PIAUD Study Program of UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu

Formulation of Competencies / Learning Outcomes	
A.	Key Competencies
1.	Finding new ideas in the field of Early Childhood Islamic Education
2.	Compile scientific work in the field of Early Childhood Islamic Education in accordance with the rules and methods and scientific ethics.
3.	Publish research and development results
4.	Finding problems in the field of early childhood education
5.	Mastering scientific analysis methods for problems in the field of early childhood education
6.	Finding alternative solutions to problems in the field of Early Childhood Islamic Education.
7.	Finding new ideas in the field of Early Childhood Islamic Education
8.	Mastering scientific communication methods through media to the public
9.	Communicate the results of the discovery of new ideas, ideas in the field of Early Childhood Islamic Education.
10.	Know and be able to identify problems in the field of Early Childhood Islamic Education
11.	Mastering scientific research techniques and methods in the field of early childhood education
12.	Can determine the results of research studies in accordance with the scientific approach to early childhood education.
13.	Mastering the fields of science that are relevant to Early Childhood Islamic Education
14.	Able to follow the development of advances in science and technology in the field of Early Childhood Islamic Education
15.	Well-versed in Early Childhood Islamic Education
16.	Developing Islamic early childhood education lesson plans
17.	Able and mastering early childhood learning methods
18.	Conduct learning activities in Islamic early childhood education
19.	Evaluating the learning outcomes of Islamic early childhood education
20.	Monitoring and supervising the implementation of the early childhood education teaching and learning process
	Mastering the development of Early Childhood Islamic Education
22.	Mastering the science of early childhood development
23.	Able to manage early childhood education institutions properly and optimally
24.	Able to make partnerships and build networks in the development of early childhood education
25.	Able to do good administration of early childhood education
26.	Able to guarantee data originality correctly

Table 3. Course learning outcomes (CLO)

Code	Subject	Formulation of Course Learning Outcomes
PIAUD MKU OO1	Al-Quran Studies - Hadith	Understand study, discover, basic concepts of early childhood education based on Al-Quran and Hadith sources
PIAUD MKU OO2	Islamic Thought and Civilization	Know and understand the patterns of Islamic thought and civilization
PIAUD MKK OO1	PIAUD Philosophy	Understand and be able to analyze the philosophy of PIAUD
PIAUD MKK OO2	PIAUD Curriculum Development	Know and be able to follow the development of the PIAUD curriculum
PIAUD MKK OO3	Early Childhood Development	Able to understand and motivate all aspects of early childhood development

Code	Subject	Formulation of Course Learning Outcomes
PIAUD MKK OO4	Development of Educational Teaching Tools	Able to understand, use, and follow the development of educational teaching aids
PIAUD MKK OO5	PIAUD Management	Know and be able to apply PIAUD management appropriately
PIAUD MKK OO6	Assessment of PIAUD Learning Process and Outcomes	Able to understand the concepts and implement assessment of learning processes and outcomes
PIAUD MKK OO7	PIAUD Edutainment	Understand the concept of edutainment and can apply it to PIAUD.
PIAUD MKK OO8	PIAUD Research Methodology	Understand and be able to implement research methods and techniques
PIAUD MKK OO9	PIAUD Learning Model Practice	Able to implement various learning modes for PIAUD
PIAUD MKK O10	Basic Concepts of PIAUD	Understand and know exactly the basic concepts of PIAUD
PIAUD MKP OO1	Analysis of PIAUD Problems*	Able to analyze various PIAUD problems
PIAUD MKP OO2	PIAUD Information and Communication Technology*	Understand and be able to apply communication technology in PIAUD
PIAUD MKP OO3	Integrated Learning*	Understand the concept and application of integrated learning in PIAUD
PIAUD MKP OO4	Playgroup Management*	Understand and be able to apply the concept of playgroup management
PIAUD MKA OO1	PIAUD Seminar	Able to conduct seminars and compile research proposals correctly

The results of a survey of students of the Master's program in early childhood Islamic education (PIAUD) of UIN Prof. K. H. Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto and UIN Fatmawati Sukarno Bengkulu resulted in a data description of the desired profession after completing their studies, the largest percentage became a lecturer, but there were a few percent who led to the profession of educational consultants, practitioners or education organizers (An et al., 1998; Marrelli et al., 2005).

Table 4. Percentage of results by type of desired profession/job

No.	Type of Profession/Title	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1	Lecturer / Civil Servant	23	72 %
2	ECD Practitioner/Organizer	13	40 %
3	Entrepreneur	5	15 %
4	Early Childhood Consultant	5	15 %
5	No opinion	0	0

Table 5. Percentage results based on desired learning needs

No.	Learning Type	Respondents	Percentage
1	Specialized fieldwork	9	28 %
2	Internship in the field of specialization	6	18 %
3	Working lectures and additional materials	5	15 %
4	Comparative Study	15	46 %
5	No opinion	3	1 %

Discussion

The questionnaire results on students' perceived learning needs reveal that most aim to pursue careers as lecturers and professionals or administrators in early childhood education (Mafra & Sinarti, 2019; Qurtubi, 2023). The study analysis focuses on identifying the competencies essential for embarking on a lecturing career, linking these competencies to learning needs that are expected to influence professional success (Hidayat et al., 2020). According to the constitution, a lecturer is defined as a professional educator and researcher whose primary role is to impart, expand, and disseminate knowledge, technology, and art through education, research, and community service (Anggrainy et al., 2023). The lecturer's role as a professional is regulated by law and is confirmed through the possession of an educator certificate, which elevates their status and responsibilities as learning facilitators, developers of knowledge, and contributors to societal advancement. This role is integral to enhancing the quality of national education, aiming to fulfill the national education system's objectives. These objectives center on fostering the development of students into individuals who are faithful, morally upright, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and engaged citizens with a commitment to democracy and responsibility (UU No. 14 Tahun 2005 tentang Guru dan Dosen, Article 1).

Lecturers must have academic qualifications, competencies, teaching certificates, be physically and mentally healthy, meet other qualifications required by the higher education unit where they work, and have the ability to realize national education goals (Rizki Amelia, 2019). The minimum academic qualification is a graduate of the Master's program for Diploma programs or Bachelor's programs, and a graduate of the Doctoral program for postgraduate programs (Marrelli et al., 2005).

In carrying out their professional duties, lecturers have obligations:

- a. Carry out education, research, and community service
- b. Planning and implementing the learning process, as well as assessing and evaluating learning outcomes
- c. Improve and develop academic qualifications and competencies on an ongoing basis that are in line with the development of science, technology, and art.
- d. Act objectively and non-discriminatorily on the basis of gender, religion, ethnicity, race, physical condition, or socioeconomic background of learners in learning.
- e. Uphold the laws and regulations, the law and code of ethics, as well as religious and ethical values.
- f. Maintaining and fostering national unity and integrity

Thus, lecturers are professional educators and scientists who are tasked with transforming and developing education through the implementation of educational, research, and community service tasks (Mafra & Sinarti, 2019). The definition of the lecturer profession and the duties of lecturers have also been briefly explained. There are 3 tasks of lecturers that are listed in the Tri Dharma of Higher Education (Pendidikan et al., 2023). Namely the tasks of education, research, and community service. Tri Dharma then becomes the basis in knowing and determining the main duties of a lecturer. Beyond these main tasks, lecturers also have a number of obligations, especially for lecturers who have served as professors or professors. Usually, the lecturer must carry out additional duties.

Who, then, is eligible to become a lecturer? According to Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, lecturers must meet specific criteria: they should possess academic qualifications, relevant competencies, a teaching certificate, physical fitness, and the ability to fulfill national educational objectives. In practice, anyone can pursue a career as a lecturer by satisfying the primary requirement of academic qualifications. Since 2014, eligibility to become a lecturer has required obtaining a master's degree that aligns with one's undergraduate field of study. Additionally, prospective lecturers must meet any other qualifications or criteria set by the hiring institution. Lecturers in higher education institutions are categorized by their employment status and affiliation with the institution.

The legislation highlights that the lecturing profession necessitates a solid foundation in the *Tridharma* of higher education, which includes expertise and experience in education and teaching, research, and community service (Benge et al., 2019). To acquire this foundation, students in a master's program, such as Early Childhood Islamic Education, must complete each course to gain the necessary knowledge and experience (Elyana & Das, 2022).

The load that must be completed is described in the lecture curriculum in the study program at each university as explained at the beginning of the description of the research results, which can be calculated by the number of semester credit units or credits that must be taken at the higher education institution. The distribution of learning followed by students within a period of four semesters is still dominated by the improvement of knowledge and is still very small in the field of experience or field practice. The lecturer profession requires expertise to be professional in the field, in this case both in higher education institutions and in early childhood education institutions.

The needs analysis based on competencies about the profession results in the learning needs of students of the master's program in early childhood Islamic education still not seem to meet the criteria required in the legislation on the lecturer profession. The shortcomings are in field knowledge. The percentage of learning in the field, even in one university in this study, has not been implemented at all, but in another university, it already exists but in a very small percentage because it is only included in the science course.

The analysis of learning needs by taking into account the results of the survey with questionnaires interviewed shows that students need the largest percentage of learning that can specifically provide field knowledge in the form of work courses such as internships or field practice, which is directed according to the profession that students are interested in or expect to have after completing their studies. Another item also on the percentage that is no less important is the emergence of students' desire to have a profession as an early childhood education consultant. It is known that early childhood consultants can work in a variety of environments and sectors, such as preschools, child care centers, Head Start programs, school districts, state agencies, non-profit organizations, or private businesses. Depending on the context and client, a consultant may carry out various roles and responsibilities, such as conducting assessments and evaluations of early childhood programs and environments, developing and implementing improvement plans and quality standards, providing coaching and training to educators and staff, developing and facilitating workshops on topics related to early childhood education and development, creating curricula and policies for programs, providing technical assistance and resources to stakeholders, advocating for the needs of young children and their families, and collaborating with other professionals.

The Master of Early Childhood Education (PIAUD) study program focuses on a deeper understanding of learning needs to achieve the expected graduate competencies. In this context, learning needs assessment is not just about assessing current needs, but also includes strategic planning to respond to future challenges. The evaluation aims to ensure that graduates have relevant and adaptive competencies in accordance with social, technological, and educational changes. This process includes an analysis of student needs based on factors such as developments in educational technology, a dynamic curriculum, and the needs of the world of work. One important aspect of this evaluation is identifying the critical skills students need to survive and thrive in their professional environment. In this case, the assessment includes mapping academic skills, social skills and practical skills that must

be achieved during the study period. The long-term impact of this evaluation can be seen in how graduates are able to face challenges in the workforce and contribute effectively to the development of early childhood education. With a more detailed and comprehensive evaluation, study programs can make continuous curriculum adjustments, provide a more focused learning experience, and create graduates who are not only competent, but also highly competitive in the world of education and research.

Achint Atri, a LinkedIn Top Voice in consulting and education from Gurugram, Haryana, India, describes an early childhood consultant as a specialist who offers expertise, guidance, and support to individuals, organizations, and institutions involved in the care, education, and development of young children, typically from birth to around eight years old (Atri, 2023). These consultants collaborate with educators, parents, childcare providers, and organizations to enhance the quality of early childhood programs and services, creating an impactful role in early education. Similarly, Muhammad Azfar Mustafa, a digital strategic consultant, defines early childhood consultants as professionals who assist various stakeholders in improving early childhood educational and developmental services for young children, reinforcing the consultant's role in elevating program quality (Mustafa, 2023).

From these perspectives, early childhood education consultancy emerges as a viable career path for graduates of a master's program in Early Childhood Islamic Education. Research shows that approximately 40% of students express an interest in becoming consultants, underscoring the importance of a curriculum that aligns with the skills and knowledge needed in early childhood education consulting (Elyana & Das, 2022). To support this career trajectory, the curriculum should incorporate practical learning experiences and materials that enable students to apply their knowledge effectively within the field, meeting the aspirations of future consultants in early childhood Islamic education (Benge et al., 2019; Elyana & Das, 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

This study, aimed at assessing the specific learning needs of Master's students in the Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) program, reveals a strong student interest in the teaching profession, particularly in gaining practical experience through internships, field-based learning, and comparative studies. The findings highlight that aligning the curriculum with the essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective early childhood Islamic education is critical for graduate success. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of integrating competencies across education, research, and community service domains, addressing the second research objective of identifying and embedding these learning needs into the curriculum. However, limitations arise due to the study's focus on a single institution and reliance on self-reported data, which may not fully capture the diverse learning requirements across various educational settings. Future research should adopt a multi-institutional perspective and incorporate both qualitative and quantitative approaches to more comprehensively assess students' professional aspirations and training needs. By addressing these areas, the PIAUD Master's program can implement curriculum adjustments that align with national standards for teaching and lecturing competencies, thereby better preparing graduates for success in both local and global educational contexts.

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