THE ROLE OF MURAQABAH IN DEVELOPING PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCE AMONG ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION LECTURERS

Usman[1]*, A'zhami Alim Usman[2], Faras Puji Azizah[3]

[1]IAIN Kerinci, Jambi, Indonesia
[2]UIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
[3] UIN Imam Bonjol, Padang, Indonesia
*Corresponding Email: usmanyahyachannel@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The academic competence of lecturers is crucial for student success and the overall quality of education. This study aims to explore how the practice of muraqabah can enhance the pedagogical competence of lecturers, specifically those at Islamic universities in Sumatera, Indonesia. A qualitative, phenomenological approach was employed, using semi-structured and open-ended interviews to collect data from four participants. The interview transcripts were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed that muraqabah practice positively impacted lecturers, enhancing their attitudes, ethical values, empathy, and communication skills. It also promoted the development of professional academic qualities such as discipline, responsibility, tolerance, and compliance. Participants reported an improved ability to integrate moral values into their teaching practice, thereby contributing to their pedagogical competence. This study underscores the potential of *murâqabah* as a tool for developing pedagogical skills in higher education. Its findings imply that incorporating *murâqabah* practices into professional development programs for lecturers can strengthen their academic and pedagogical capabilities, ultimately benefiting the learning environment in higher education institutions in Sumatera, Indonesia.

Keywords: Empathy, *Murâqabah*, Pedagogical Competence, Professional Development, Self-Understanding

INTRODUCTION

Murâqabah, a practice of *żikr* involving deep concentration, aims to bring individuals closer to Allah SWT by fostering a constant sense of divine presence. According to Masyitoh (2022), *murâqabah* involves living with the awareness that one is always being observed by Allah, relying completely on Him, and detaching oneself from worldly attachments. Yusuf (2017) emphasizes that this awareness makes a person mindful of their actions, feeling restless when violating divine commands. Bruinessen (1992) describes muraqabah as a form of self-control and concentration that follows the mastery of *żikr*, while Atceh (1993) compares it to *khalwat*, emphasizing training the heart to perpetually remember Allah. This practice is also considered a means of Sufi contemplation, leading individuals toward attaining *ma'rifat* (knowledge) of Allah (Bhatti et al., 2021; Khalid et al., 2021). Practitioners of muraqabah often meditate alone or under the guidance of a *mursyid*, aiming to cultivate a profound sense of connection with the divine and rid themselves of worldly distractions.

Murâqabah serves as both internal and external supervision, fostering continuous self-awareness and encouraging the correction of intentions, thoughts, and behaviour. It is vital for maintaining and enhancing an individual's wisdom and adherence to Allah's commandments (Masyitoh et al., 2022). The practice helps develop inner peace, self-awareness, and good character while promoting feelings of closeness to Allah (Harianti et

al., 2022). It also encourages discipline, responsibility, and honesty, leading to positive life habits and professional attitudes (Wiyatama & Hawadi, 2021). *Murâqabah* can be classified into three types: *murâqabah qalbî* (heart-centered prudence), *murâqabah* ruhi (spiritual intimacy with Allah), and *murâqabah* sirri (contemplation of the secrets of Allah)) (Samad, 2023). These types are interconnected, aiming to nurture the heart and soul's closeness to Allah. By incorporating *murâqabah* into teaching practice, lecturers can enhance their pedagogic competence, integrating ethical values and divine mindfulness, thereby enriching their educational environments and serving as role models for students.

Pedagogical competence is essential for lecturers to effectively deliver lectures and facilitate meaningful learning experiences (Opatha, 2020; Yusaini et. al., 2024). This competence, in particular, plays a crucial role in managing and guiding students, making lectures more impactful (Jebram et al., 2023). The development of this competence allows lecturers to significantly contribute to the growth of multipotential students (Hastuti et al., 2021). Pedagogical competence involves managing learning activities and includes planning, implementing, assessing, and improving educational outcomes (Hasbiyallah et al., 2023; Mahfudz & Sukarno, 2023). Lecturers with good pedagogical competence can master both rational and transcendental sciences, deeply embedding ethical values, empathy, effective communication, and professionalism in their teaching practices (Hastuti et al., 2021; Mykytuk et al., 2023).

The pedagogic competence of Indonesian higher education lecturers is also a key global concern, as lecturers need to meet international standards to enhance the competitiveness of graduates (Sulisworo et al., 2016; Uerz et al., 2018; Bozkurt, 2020). With rapid technological advancements, lecturers must master not only technology but also ethical and social skills, interactive communication, and academic professionalism (Akram et al., 2021; Susanto & Zasrianita, 2023). Without these competencies, lecturers' risk being overwhelmed by the fast pace of rational knowledge, which could undermine the essential moral and human values that should guide education. The integration of rational and transcendental knowledge can foster a richer educational environment, achieving optimal outcomes (Usman & Muhammad, 2023). National education law No. 20 of 2003 emphasizes developing students into individuals with strong morals, creativity, and a sense of responsibility, underlining the importance of strengthening pedagogic competence among lecturers to fulfill these educational goals.

Several studies have explored the formation of pedagogical competence in various contexts. For example, Mykytuk et al., (2023) examined the features of finance teachers at universities, while Sukirman et al., (2022) focused on developing MOOC content to enhance the pedagogical competence of Indonesian teachers. Chi and Oanh (2023) proposed a process for training online teaching competence for lecturers, and Di Battista et al. (2020) investigated dimensions of trust in lecturer-student relationships. Other studies, such as those by Berestova et al. (2020) and Ranta et al. (2023), analyzed leadership and functional competence development, as well as pedagogical competence in early childhood education, also improving the pedagogic competence of physical education teachers (Susilowati et al., 2022; Hastuti et al., 2022)

Despite these contributions, research on the impact of *murâqabah* on lecturers' pedagogical competence remains limited. This study addresses this gap by examining how *murâqabah* —a form of focused reflection and spiritual practice—can enhance pedagogical competence. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on integrating values derived from spirituality with logical theories, offering insights into how *murâqabah* helps lecturers develop ethical values, empathy, effective communication, and value-based professionalism. The study provides a new perspective on strengthening lecturers' competence by bridging rational

knowledge with transcendent values. The purpose of this study is to explore the practice of *murâqabah* to enhance the pedagogical competence of lecturers in teaching. Specifically, it aims to examine how *murâqabah* can increase self-understanding of ethical values, improve empathy and communication in learning, and enhance the development of lecturers' professionalism.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological perspective (Moustakas, 1994) to explore individual experiences of lecturers who have participated in muraqabah and its implications for strengthening pedagogical competence (Wicks, 2017). The focus was to gain an in-depth understanding of how muraqabah is applied in teaching. The phenomenological approach proved constructive for gathering detailed information from participants. The research was conducted at three Islamic universities in Sumatra, Indonesia, which provided convenient access to the necessary data. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, targeting lecturers who had participated in *murâqabah* and met the inclusion criteria. Researchers found and assigned four male participants, aged between 40 and 60 years, from different study programs. Pseudonyms were used to protect the confidentiality of participants' identities and affiliations.

Data collection was conducted after receiving approval from each study program at the three Islamic universities involved. Communication was established both directly and via WhatsApp, with researchers explaining the study's purpose and data collection process. The data collection involved semi-structured and unstructured interviews to capture both primary and complementary data, respectively. Interviews were conducted between September and November 2023, lasting 50-60 minutes, and were conducted in Indonesian to ensure clarity. The interviews were subsequently translated into English. Researchers adopted a mixed approach for interviews, conducting two face-to-face and two via WhatsApp, depending on participants' preferences. Before each interview, ethical considerations, privacy, and confidentiality were discussed to ensure proper data management. The interviews began with open-ended questions to explore the impact of muraqabah on ethical values, empathy and communication in learning, and lecturers' professionalism. All collected data were transcribed and repeatedly reviewed to achieve a complete understanding. The data analysis involved thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's six-step coding process (2006), which included familiarization with the data, coding, identifying themes, reviewing and naming themes, and preparing the report. Thematic analysis helped identify unique codes and develop research themes, which were confirmed with participants for accuracy and validity before finalizing the report (Creswell, 2014; Saldana & Omasta, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings of the study, focusing on three main themes that emerged from the analysis of lecturers' experiences practicing *murâqabah*: self-understanding as the primary holder of ethical values, empathy and communication skills, and value-based professionalism development. These themes highlight the significant role that *murâqabah* plays in enhancing pedagogical competence. By fostering deeper ethical awareness, improving empathy and communication abilities, and cultivating professionalism grounded in values, *murâqabah* contributes holistically to the personal and professional growth of lecturers. The following sections provide a detailed discussion of each of these themes.

Self-Understanding as the Primary Holder of Ethical Values

The first theme identified in this study is self-understanding as the primary holder of ethical values, which plays a crucial role in shaping the foundations of effective teaching. This

self-awareness is essential for educators, as it directly influences their interactions with students, their approach to teaching, and their ability to foster a positive learning environment. Through the practice of *murâqabah*, participants reported significant improvements in their ethical characteristics, enabling them to embody the values necessary for effective teaching.

Participants described how muraqabah facilitated the development of noble characteristics such as honesty, patience, charisma, and fairness. The benefits and wisdom of following muraqabah might improve intentions, strengthen faith, honesty, justice, patience, and piety to Allah almighty. They improve the ability to teach (Donal, Personal Communication, Januari 2023). *Murâqabah* educated the participant to be calm, forgiving, patient, holy, honest, open, fair, and more. This can help ease the way he teaches (Zaki, Personal communication, January 2023) These reflections illustrate how the practice of *murâqabah* not only fosters personal growth but also equips lecturers with the ethical foundations necessary for their pedagogical roles.

The impact of *murâqabah* extends beyond the acquisition of ethical values; it also enhances self-awareness and emotional control among participants. The participant felt that there was a difference between before and after participating in muraqabah. Previously, he did not have a strong belief in Allah, but afterward, he gained trust and confidence in him (Anton, personal communication, January 2023). After participating in muraqabah, the participant could control his emotions, feel calm, and conduct self-introspection, starting with his attitude toward the heart, mentality, actions, and behaviour in the academic environment (Amin, Personal Communication, March 2023). These statements demonstrate how the practice fosters a deeper understanding of oneself, allowing educators to engage in thorough self-reflection and emotional regulation.

In summary, the practice of *murâqabah* significantly contributes to participants' self-understanding and the cultivation of ethical values, which are essential for effective teaching. By enhancing self-awareness, emotional control, and the ability to conduct self-introspection, *murâqabah* positively impacts lecturers' roles as educators. As they embody these ethical values, they become more effective in their teaching practices, ultimately benefiting their students and the broader academic community.

Empathy and Communication Skills

Empathy and communication skills are critical components for improving the learning environment and enhancing student-teacher interactions. In an educational setting, the ability to understand and respond to students' needs significantly impacts their engagement and success. The practice of *murâqabah* has proven instrumental in helping lecturers develop these essential skills, enabling them to foster better relationships with their students and create a more supportive learning atmosphere.

Through *murâqabah*, participants reported a heightened awareness of their students' needs, which in turn improved their ability to empathize and communicate effectively. The participant felt the benefits of muraqabah educating him to feel the care and feelings of others, allowing him to adjust his communication with students better and empathically (Donal, Personal communication, January 2023). This sentiment reflects the transformative power of muraqabah in promoting understanding and compassion among educators. *Murâqabah* taught me to repair broken and strained relationships and solve problems well and beneficially (Zaki, personal communication, January 2023). His experience underscores the role of empathy in fostering positive interactions, allowing educators to address conflicts constructively and supportively. *Murâqabah* taught him to be more careful in behaving, speaking, and acting to create better relationships, illustrating how this practice cultivates mindfulness in communication (Anton, personal communication, January 2023).

The analysis of these experiences reveals that empathy, rooted in the practice of *murâqabah*, enhances lecturers' ability to maintain positive relationships with their students. By fostering a deeper understanding of students' emotions and challenges, educators can adapt their communication styles to better meet individual needs. He gained experience from *murâqabah*, creating better conditions in lectures, understanding the needs and problems of students and finding solutions with kindness (Amin, personal communication, January 2023). This highlights how empathy enables educators to create a conducive learning environment where students feel valued and supported.

In conclusion, the practice of *murâqabah* plays a pivotal role in developing empathy and communication skills among lecturers. By enhancing their understanding of students' needs and fostering compassionate communication, educators can establish positive relationships that contribute to a supportive and effective learning environment. The value of empathy in education cannot be overstated, as it not only benefits individual student-teacher interactions but also fosters a culture of respect and understanding within the broader academic community.

Value-Based Professionalism Development

Murâqabah plays a pivotal role in promoting value-based professionalism among lecturers, enabling them to integrate spiritual values into their professional practices. This practice encourages lecturers to engage in deep self-reflection, which helps them internalize essential values that guide their interactions with students and colleagues. Participants in this study shared that through *murâqabah*, they could establish a profound connection between their spiritual beliefs and professional responsibilities, fostering a more holistic approach to their roles as educators. By embracing this practice, lecturers not only enhance their pedagogical skills but also cultivate an ethical framework that shapes their teaching philosophy and professional conduct.

The insights from participants reveal how muraqabah facilitates introspection and value internalization, which are crucial for professional development. The continuous practice of *murâqabah* allows him to understand the pathways of his heart, thoughts, feelings, and actions, ultimately motivating him to grow both personally and professionally (Donal, Personal Communication, January 2023). The practice of *murâqabah* serves as a special opportunity for self-evaluation and a means to strengthen his integrity (Zaki, Personal Communication, January 2023). After engaging in *murâqabah*, he experienced a shift in his interpersonal relationships with students, fostering honesty and openness in his interactions (Anton, personal communication, January 2023). This practice not only deepened his understanding of Allah's values but also helped him translate those values into his teaching methods, establishing a direct link between his spiritual beliefs and professional behaviour (Amin, personal communication, March 2023).

Participants provided specific examples of how they apply the values acquired through *murâqabah* in their teaching practices. Donal mentioned that he strives to create an inclusive and supportive classroom environment where students feel valued and understood. Zaki pointed out that he actively encourages open communication with students, recognizing their needs and concerns as essential to fostering a conducive learning atmosphere. Anton illustrated how he maintains fairness and transparency in grading, ensuring that students perceive him as a trustworthy educator. Amin discussed his commitment to instilling ethical values in his students, using his spiritual beliefs to guide his approach to teaching and mentoring. These real-life applications demonstrate how the principles derived from *murâqabah* not only enhance individual professionalism but also contribute to a more ethical and responsible academic community.

The synthesis of these insights indicates that the value-based professionalism resulting from *murâqabah* significantly contributes to creating a more ethical, responsible, and meaningful academic environment. Lecturers who engage in this practice are better equipped to align their professional duties with their spiritual beliefs, leading to enhanced self-awareness, integrity, and empathy in their interactions with students. As they embody these values, they foster a culture of respect, collaboration, and support within their educational institutions, ultimately benefiting not only themselves but also their students and the broader academic community. Thus, *murâqabah* serves as a powerful catalyst for professional development, reinforcing the importance of integrating spiritual values into educational practices.

Based on the above results, there are several points to discuss. The findings of this study illuminate the profound impact of muraqabah on lecturers' pedagogical competence, particularly through the lenses of self-understanding, empathy, and value-based professionalism. These elements are essential components of pedagogical competence, which encompasses not only knowledge and skills in teaching but also the ethical and emotional dimensions that influence educators' effectiveness in the classroom.

The theme of self-understanding highlights the foundational role of self-awareness in shaping ethical values and teaching practices. The participants reported significant improvements in their ethical characteristics, including honesty, patience, and fairness, through their engagement with *murâqabah*. This aligns with the pedagogical competence framework, which posits that effective educators must possess a strong sense of self-awareness and ethical grounding. By fostering self-understanding, lecturers can enhance their interactions with students, which is essential for creating a positive learning environment. The ability to engage in self-reflection and introspection allows educators to navigate their emotional states and behavioural responses, ultimately contributing to their effectiveness as teachers.

Self-understanding serves as the cornerstone of ethical values for participants, fostering a profound awareness of their identity, strengths, and weaknesses. This self-awareness shapes their attitudes and behaviours, grounding them in principles such as honesty, justice, patience, and morality when managing lectures. A deep understanding of ethical values allows educators to recognize the impact of their actions on themselves, their students, and the broader environment, guiding students through complex ethical situations. As noted by Catalano et al. (2023) and Karman et al. (2024), the effectiveness of teaching hinges on lecturers' ability to create supportive learning environments, which significantly influences student growth and development over time. The internalization of ethical values not only shapes students' beliefs and attitudes (Ikhwan et al., 2020; Harisa, 2019) but also motivates them to align with the goals set by their lecturers (Tesi et al., 2022). Through *murâqabah*, participants enhance their self-awareness, allowing them to evaluate their behaviours and decisions against their ethical values. This practice encourages deep self-reflection and accountability, rooted in divine principles, which forms a solid foundation for pedagogical competence in managing and supporting students.

Empathy and communication skills emerged as critical components for improving the learning environment and enhancing student-teacher interactions. The findings indicate that through the practice of *murâqabah*, lecturers developed a heightened awareness of their students' needs, enabling them to communicate more effectively and compassionately. This ability to empathize directly contributes to pedagogical competence by fostering positive relationships with students. When educators can understand and respond to students' emotions and challenges, they create a supportive atmosphere that enhances student engagement and success. As highlighted by the participants, the cultivation of empathy not only improves interpersonal relationships but also facilitates problem-solving and conflict

resolution in the classroom. These skills are essential for effective teaching and are key indicators of pedagogical competence.

The participants' experience with muraqabah significantly enhanced their understanding of feelings and thoughts, fostering greater sensitivity to challenges and an increase in empathy towards student needs. This practice emphasizes the importance of presence and attention in interactions, encouraging educators to engage actively and teach with calmness. By integrating *murâqabah* into their teaching, participants build positive interpersonal relationships, allowing them to organize, manage, and motivate students effectively. Empathy, as highlighted by Kester et al. (2022), involves the ability to understand others' feelings and experiences, making it essential for educators to listen to students' concerns with genuine empathy (Laksana et al., 2023). Such engagement fosters self-awareness in interactions (Schat et al., 2023) and requires adaptability based on contextual circumstances (Panjwani, 2020). Additionally, participants reflected on their communication skills, engaging in introspection to enhance both verbal and non-verbal interactions. By using language that resonates with students, they can improve understanding and collaboration, as supported by cross-curricular initiatives aimed at boosting communication proficiency (Dunbar et al., 2006; Aprianto & Zaini, 2019). Ultimately, effective communication not only enhances student achievement but also strengthens interpersonal relationships and supports personal and professional development (Wahyuni et al., 2018), positioning participants as influential communicators through ongoing practice.

The findings also underscore the significance of value-based professionalism in developing pedagogical competence. *Murâqabah* promotes an integration of spiritual values into professional practices, allowing educators to align their ethical beliefs with their teaching methods. The participants' experiences illustrate how introspection and internalization of values lead to a more ethical and responsible approach to education. By embodying these values, lecturers foster a culture of respect, collaboration, and support within their academic institutions. This alignment of spiritual beliefs with professional responsibilities enhances self-awareness, integrity, and empathy in educators, contributing to a more meaningful academic environment. The synthesis of these insights suggests that value-based professionalism is integral to pedagogical competence, as it reinforces ethical behaviour and responsible decision-making in educational contexts.

The research findings indicate that participants practicing *murâqabah* develop a strong foundation for instilling values in their roles as higher education lecturers, focusing on value-based professionalism that enhances their competencies and work quality. Guided by principles such as integrity, responsibility, and respect, they create meaningful and positive work practices (Balaji Iyer, 2013; Salamah, 2024). Value-based ethical leadership fosters trust and integrity, essential for professional academic values (Kilag & Escribano, 2024). Given the complexities of education today, the application of value-based education is crucial (Prendeville & Kinsella, 2022), promoting social sensitivity and responsibility that positively impacts students and the academic community. Islamic values serve as a source of inspiration and tranquillity, creating an environment conducive to effective teaching (Fauziah et al., 2024). Continuous learning and improvement in designing, implementing, and evaluating educational activities are vital. The practice of *murâqabah* enhances lecturers' pedagogic competence by fostering self-awareness of ethical and moral values, emotional regulation, empathy, and integrity, ultimately leading to more responsible material delivery. Thus, incorporating *murâqabah* not only enhances lecturer competence but also cultivates a higher quality educational environment, grounded in experience and divine oversight.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the practice of *murâqabah* significantly contributes to enhancing pedagogical competence among lecturers by fostering

self-understanding, empathy, and value-based professionalism. As educators engage in self-reflection and develop a deeper understanding of their ethical values, they become more effective in their teaching practices, ultimately benefiting their students to develop their good moral (Razak, 2021) . The integration of spiritual values into pedagogical approaches not only enriches the educators' personal growth but also cultivates a more ethical and supportive learning environment (Brinkhof et al., 2023). This study highlights the importance of incorporating practices like *murâqabah* into professional development programs for educators, emphasizing the need to address the emotional and ethical dimensions of teaching as integral components of pedagogical competence. By doing so, educational institutions can promote holistic growth for both educators and students, ultimately leading to improved educational outcomes and a more compassionate academic community.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlights the significant impact of the practice of *murâqabah* on self-understanding, empathy, communication skills, and value-based professionalism among lecturers. *Murâqabah* fosters a deep self-awareness that enhances educators' ethical characteristics, such as honesty, patience, and fairness, which are crucial for effective teaching. Participants reported improved emotional regulation and the ability to empathize with students, leading to stronger relationships and a more supportive learning environment. Additionally, the introspective nature of *murâqabah* allows lecturers to integrate their spiritual beliefs with professional responsibilities, promoting ethical behaviour and a holistic approach to education. By embodying these values, lecturers not only enhance their own professional development but also cultivate a culture of respect and collaboration within the academic community, ultimately benefiting both students and the educational institution as a whole.

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