

INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCE AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH IN ISLAMIC EDUCATION TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal competencies, such as communication, empathy, and collaboration, are fundamental to teacher professionalism in Islamic Religious Education (IRE). However, there is limited understanding of how these skills vary across Indonesia's diverse contexts. This study investigates regional variations in the interpersonal competencies of IRE teachers and their socio-demographic predictors. A quantitative survey was conducted with 12,002 teachers selected through stratified random sampling across multiple provinces. Furthermore, data collection involved a Likert-scale online questionnaire, complemented by offline methods in regions with limited internet connectivity. To examine regional disparities and socio-demographic factors, descriptive statistics, ANOVA, and regression analyses were conducted, and spatial variations were illustrated using GIS mapping. The findings of this study reveal significant disparities, with urban teachers reporting higher levels of interpersonal competence compared to their rural counterparts, as well as notable differences across Indonesia's major islands. These results underscore the critical role of socio-cultural and infrastructural factors in shaping teacher professionalism. By providing empirical evidence of regional inequalities, this study enriches the discourse on Islamic education and highlights the importance of context-sensitive professional development initiatives that aim to enhance interpersonal competencies and promote greater educational equity in Indonesia.

Keywords: Interpersonal Competence, Islamic Education Teachers, Regional Diversity

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized educational landscape, teacher professionalism is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional construct that encompasses not only pedagogical knowledge and subject matter expertise, but also interpersonal competencies and skills. Across diverse contexts, interpersonal skills, such as empathy, effective communication, and emotional intelligence, are regarded as essential for building inclusive and student-centred learning environments (Frana & Correia, 2022; Molina-Moreno et al., 2024; Pavlidou & Alevriadou, 2022; Xie & Derakhshan, 2021). In the current era of digital transformation, where technology mediates many educational interactions, interpersonal competencies remain vital for fostering meaningful relationships between teachers and students.

Within the scope of Islamic education, teachers fulfil a dual role as both instructors and moral guides. IRE teachers are responsible not only for transmitting religious knowledge but also for shaping students' character and spiritual values (Biesta & Hannam, 2016; Metcalfe & Moulin-Stožek, 2021; Saepudin et al., 2023). Their ability to create emotionally safe, respectful, and spiritually nurturing environments is crucial to fulfilling this mandate (Muhaemin et al., 2023; San-Martín et al., 2021). In this regard, interpersonal competence constitutes a fundamental dimension of an IRE teacher's professionalism, as it enables them to maintain effective communication and foster positive relationships that directly influence both learning quality and student character development.

Although the significance of teacher interpersonal competence is well acknowledged, prior studies have predominantly examined its broad associations with academic achievement, student motivation, and classroom management (Indrawati et al., 2023; Misbah et al., 2022; Tian & Shen, 2023). Nevertheless, merely a limited number of studies have examined interpersonal competence, particularly among IRE teachers, and even fewer have adopted a large-scale, regionally comparative perspective. This gap underscores the need to examine how contextual factors, including geographic location, cultural background, and access to professional development, influence the interpersonal competencies of IRE teachers within Indonesia's diverse educational landscape. To address this gap, the present study provides empirical evidence from a nationwide survey of 12,002 IRE teachers, offering insight into regional disparities and socio-demographic influences. Thereby, contributing to both theories and practices, informing context-sensitive professional development programs that aim to strengthen teacher professionalism and promote educational equity across Indonesia.

Indonesia's geographic, social, and cultural diversity presents both challenges and opportunities for IRE teachers. Educators in urban areas often manage socially heterogeneous classrooms that require cultural sensitivity and social intelligence, whereas teachers in rural settings frequently contend with limited institutional support and restricted access to professional development (Camacho & Parham, 2019; Rana & Kanwal, 2020). These contextual variations are likely to influence the development of teachers' interpersonal competencies across regions. Examining such disparities is therefore essential for designing teacher training programs and education policies.

Theoretically, interpersonal competence is defined as the ability to interact effectively with others, combining motivation, knowledge, and adaptive behaviour. (Bochner & Kelly, 1974; Spitzberg, 1991). It encompasses goal orientation, cooperation, and contextual adaptation. Closely related to social intelligence (Thorndike & Stein, 1937), interpersonal competence also draws on contextual intelligence, which enables individuals to read and respond to social cues across diverse environments (Kutz & Bamford-Wade, 2013; Sternberg, 1984). In Indonesia, the distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (rural) and *Gesellschaft* (urban) communities, as described by Tonnies (Heberle, 1937), provides a practical sociological framework for understanding the regional variance in teachers' social interaction patterns.

This study addresses the identified research gap by mapping the interpersonal competencies of 12,002 IRE teachers across Indonesia using a quantitative, area-based approach. By combining statistical analysis and GIS techniques, it provides empirical evidence on how interpersonal skills vary across different cultural and geographic contexts. The findings are expected to contribute to the professionalization of IRE teachers, inform policy development, and enhance pedagogical practices in Islamic education, both in Indonesia and globally.

METHOD

This study was conducted to address the urgent need to strengthen the professionalism of IRE teachers, a factor widely recognized as central to enhancing educational quality. The research problem is framed around the extent to which the interpersonal competence of IRE teachers contributes to advancing teacher professionalism across diverse regions of Indonesia. In addition, the study aims to analyze and identify the regional factors that influence teachers' interpersonal competence and to explore strategies for enhancing teacher professionalism. This

research contributes to the broader discourse on IRE teacher development by offering both theoretical and empirical insights. Theoretically, it engages with the concept of teacher professionalism, elaborating its definitions, dimensions, and indicators, with a specific emphasis on the role of IRE teachers. Subsequently, interpersonal competence is examined in depth as a crucial dimension of professionalism. Empirically, the study draws upon prior research on the conditions and challenges of Islamic Education teacher professionalism in Indonesia and critically reviews existing models for improving teacher professionalism through the reinforcement of interpersonal competence.

This research methodology employs a quantitative approach with a descriptive survey design. The research population consisted of all Islamic Education teachers in Indonesia, with a sample of 12,002 individuals selected proportionally based on geographical area, using a stratified random sampling technique. Data were collected through an online questionnaire based on a Likert scale covering aspects of communication, empathy, and collaboration. Data collection through online questionnaires ensures representation of data from various regions in Indonesia. Data analysis techniques include descriptive statistics (such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation of competencies), as well as inferential statistics using ANOVA and regression. These techniques are employed to examine differences in interpersonal competencies based on geographic region, work experience, or educational level, using ANOVA or t-tests. Additionally, regression analysis is utilized to determine the relationship between interpersonal competence and demographic and professional variables. Data distribution was visualized using Geographic Information System (GIS) tools and data visualization software to map the regional distribution of interpersonal competencies among Islamic Religious Education teachers across Indonesia in an interactive format.

The results and discussion of this study provide a comprehensive overview of the interpersonal competencies of IRE teachers in both urban and rural areas, categorized by region and location of assignment. Furthermore, the differences are described. This study also examines the relationship between interpersonal competency and teacher professionalism. The conclusion highlights the significance of interpersonal competence in enhancing the professionalism of Islamic Religious Education teachers in Indonesia. Furthermore, the recommendations of this study are proposed in relation to policies on the education, training, and development of Islamic Religious Education teachers, based on interpersonal competencies, as well as suggestions for further research to deepen the study and broaden its scope in the future. In this regard, the framework of this study is supported by literature that highlights the importance of interpersonal competence of IRE teachers in improving professionalism, including mastery of pedagogical, personality, social, and professional competence, as well as development efforts through training and collaboration.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interpersonal Competence of Indonesian IRE Teachers in General

Interpersonal competency survey data were collected from 12,002 Islamic Religious Education teachers in Indonesia via Google Forms, using 13 questionnaire statements. The survey was conducted by all IRE teachers who work in various areas, including cities and villages, across education levels ranging from TK to SMA. The descriptive statistics in SPSS are used to analyze the gathered data, and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis Results

Question	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	12002	1	5	4.68	.664
Q2	12002	1	5	4.56	.699
Q3	12002	1	5	4.62	.670
Q4	12002	1	5	4.62	.655
Q5	12002	1	5	4.47	.717
Q6	12002	1	5	4.18	.859
Q7	12002	1	5	4.11	.928
Q8	12002	1	5	3.80	1.040
Q9	12002	1	5	4.21	.841
Q10	12002	1	5	4.00	.961
Q11	12002	1	5	3.99	.938
Q12	12002	1	5	3.92	.955
Q13	12002	1	5	3.89	.975

The data in Table 1 shows relatively similar teacher answers to almost all questions asked. The average teacher's interpersonal skills IRE range from an average of 3.80 to 4.68. On the contrary, the lowest average interpersonal skills were observed in question number eight (Q8), specifically an average of 3.80 regarding the use of artificial intelligence applications in communicating with students. Furthermore, the highest average ability was 4.68 on question Q1, which asked about motivating students to follow the learning process. In the standard deviation, it is noted that diversity is observed in question number 8 (Q8) regarding the use of artificial intelligence applications in communicating with students. The data portryas that the standard deviation of Q8 reached 1,040, which is the highest answer of all the data, meaning that the higher the SD obtained, the more varied the respondents' answers are, conversely, the lower the SD obtained, the more uniform the respondents' answers are, as shown in question Q4 regarding the teacher's ability to convince students to follow the learning well.

From the 13 questions about interpersonal competence that were asked, it was discovered that teacher competence was relatively the same and approached the maximum score (5) in questions about motivating students (Q1), presenting systematic learning (Q2), allowing students to understand the material (Q3), ensuring that students follow the learning well (Q4), creating provocative questions (Q5), analyzing student characteristics (Q6), using social media in communicating (Q7), sharing digital learning materials with fellow teachers (Q9), and using social media networks to interact with students (Q10). Interpersonal competence is in the moderate category in questions about using artificial intelligence applications to communicate with students (Q8), using artificial intelligence applications to help students get creative ideas (Q11), using artificial intelligence applications to help students master high-level thinking skills (HOTS) (Q12), and using artificial intelligence applications to help students work in groups (Q13).

The mapping of IRE teacher interpersonal competency in Indonesia in this study was studied through the aspects of urban and rural areas. Table 2 represents the results from the descriptive analysis.

Table 2. Teachers' Interpersonal Competence Based on Urban and Rural Areas in Indonesia

Teacher Interpersonal Competence	Region	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total	Urban	3493	3.9192	.58036	.00982
Intelligence	Rural	8508	3.8626	.59217	.00642

According to Table 2, the average interpersonal competence of teachers in urban areas is 3.9192, which is higher than that of teachers in rural areas, with an average of 3.8626. However, the answers of teachers in rural areas are more varied than those of teachers in urban areas, as indicated by the standard deviation values. Particularly, the standard deviation of 0.59217 for teachers in villages is higher than the standard deviation of 0.58036 for teachers in cities. This indicates that the interpersonal competence of teachers working in rural areas varies, as evident from the variation in responses to the questionnaire, whereas the interpersonal competence of teachers teaching in cities (urban areas) is generally uniform.

In this study, the mapping of IRE teachers' interpersonal competencies in Indonesia was examined by comparing urban and rural contexts, with the results of the descriptive analysis presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of Descriptive Analysis

					95% Confidence Interval for Mean			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
TK	75	3.8062	.57067	.06589	3.6749	3.9375	2.62	4.62
SD	8863	3.8772	.58517	.00622	3.8650	3.8894	.92	4.62
SMP	1979	3.8598	.58077	.01306	3.8342	3.8854	.92	4.62
SMA	1085	3.9335	.63515	.01928	3.8957	3.9713	.92	4.62
Total	12002	3.8790	.58929	.00538	3.8685	3.8895	.92	4.62

Taking the descriptive analysis data presented in Table 3 into consideration, the average interpersonal competence of teachers working at the TK level was 3.8062, nearly the same as the average score of 3.8772 for teachers at SD, and comparable to the average of 3.8598 for teachers at SMP. However, it is lower than the average IRE of 3.9335 interpersonal intelligence of teachers at SMA. On the other hand, the average interpersonal intelligence of IRE teachers at SMA is higher than that of IRE teachers who teach in TK, SMP, and SMA. After analyzing the standard deviation of the four levels of education where IRE teachers work in Indonesia, it is shown that the standard deviation of teachers at TK is 0.57067, lower than the standard deviation of teachers at SD (0.58517), IRE SMP (0.58077), and higher than the standard deviation of teachers at SMA (0.63515). It can be portrayed that the standard deviation of IRE teachers in SMA is higher than that of teachers' IRE in TK, SD, and SMP. This shows that the interpersonal competence of teachers TK is more uniform than the basic competence of IRE teachers at the level of work in SMA. The interpersonal competence of teachers is evident in

the workplace, showing that the higher the level of education within the work unit, the more diverse the interpersonal intelligence.

Differences in Competence of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Urban and Rural Areas

Differences in the Interpersonal Competence of IRE Teachers by Area of Assignment in Indonesia. To examine variations in interpersonal competence between teachers in urban and rural settings, an independent samples t-test was employed. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Total intelligence	Equal Variances assumed	1.679	.195	4.783	11999	.000	.05658	.01183	.03339	.07978
	Equal variances not assumed			4.823	6618.843	.000	.05658	.01173	.03359	.07958

From the independent samples test in Table 4, the F value = 1.679 and the p-value = 0.000 < 0.05 is obtained, meaning that H₀ is rejected, meaning that a significant difference was found between urban (city) and rural (village) areas. In Mean Group statistics, it is known that the mean of urban (city) areas, 3.9192, is higher than the mean of rural (village) areas, 3.8626, in terms of interpersonal intelligence of teachers.

When examined based on assignment level, the differences in interpersonal competence among IRE teachers in Indonesia are also significant, as presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Differences in Teacher Interpersonal Competence IRE Based on the Level of Workplace

Place of Assignment Level	N	1	Subset for alpha = 0.05
TK		75	3.8062
SMP		1979	3.8598
SD		8863	3.8772
SMA		1085	3.9335
Sig.			.059

From the results of the analysis presented in Table 5, the p-value = 0.059 > 0.05 was obtained, meaning that H₀ was accepted; therefore, it is generally known that there is no

significant difference in the level of teacher interpersonal intelligence IRE based on the level of work. This is reinforced by the average value of the three levels of tasks, namely TK, SD, and SMP. However, when compared with the average value of the four levels of assignment, differences are apparent in the interpersonal competence between IRE teachers who work at the TK, SD, and SMP levels, with the competence of IRE teachers who teach at the SMA level. The most significant difference is observed at the SMA level, which exceeds the competency of Islamic Religious Education teachers from the other three levels.

In general, the interpersonal competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers in Indonesia, who teach in both urban and rural areas, at the TK, SD, SMP, and SMA levels, shows diverse competence. The results of data analysis using linear regression show the following:

Table 6. Coefficients of the Dependent Variable

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	3.939	.029		133.893	.000		
Region	-.055	.012	-.043	-4.669	.000	.997	1.003
Place of Assignment Level	.015	.008	.016	1.786	.074	.997	1.003

The Relationship between Interpersonal Competence and Teacher Professionalism Level

The description of the relationship between interpersonal competence and the level of professionalism among Islamic Education teachers is evident from the results of the statistical analysis presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Model Summary of Dependent Variable

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			
						F	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.047 ^a	.002	.002	.58870	.002	13.034	2	11998	.000

^a Predictors: (Constant), Place of Assignment Level, region

From Table 7, the intercept value (constant) of 3.939 is obtained, representing the fundamental intelligence value without considering other variables. The regional coefficient = -0.055, indicating that competence in urban areas (cities) is superior to that in rural areas (villages). Based on the coefficient value for the level of assignment ($p = 0.015 < 0.05$), the results indicate that higher levels of assignment are associated with higher interpersonal competence among teachers. However, the magnitude of this effect is relatively low. Furthermore, the p-value based on region = $0.00 < 0.05$; and $t = -4.669$, which shows that there is a significant influence on teacher interpersonal competence, while when viewed from the place of duty, the p-value is obtained = $0.074 > 0.05$; and the t value = 1.786 means that it does not provide a strong enough influence. Likewise, when viewed from the R square value =

0.002, which means it can only explain 0.2% of the variability in teacher interpersonal competence IRE, even though the results have been adjusted, it remains 0.002, so this shows that this model has weak predictive power. In the analysis, as shown in Table 7, the F value obtained was 13.034, indicating that the overall model is significant but still has a weak predictive effect.

Based on research data, it appears that the variability of teacher interpersonal competence IRE is relatively homogeneous, both based on the teaching area (urban/rural) and based on education level (TK/SD/SMP/SMA). As for Ferdinand Tönnies' perspective on the *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* theories (Benoist et al., 1994; Heberle, 1937), the homogeneity of teacher interpersonal competence in IRE can be linked to the character of the social community in the school and community environment. In the context of *Gemeinschaft* (traditional society), teachers in rural areas tend to have closer social relationships with students, parents, and the surrounding community. This can naturally strengthen the interpersonal competence of teachers. In the context of *Gesellschaft* (modern/urban society), interpersonal relationships are more functional and based on professionalism. This suggests that, despite differences in social character across various regions in Indonesia, teachers' interpersonal competence continues to develop relatively evenly, indicating that teachers can effectively adapt to the context of *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (community).

Although relatively homogeneous, the results of this study also indicate that, based on their work area, there is a tendency for IRE teachers in urban areas to have higher interpersonal competence than those in rural areas. This appears to be related to urban teachers' easier access to interact with the broader educational community (Cavendish et al., 2020; Edo & Yasin, 2024), including with fellow teachers, educational organizations, and religious institutions. In addition, a study in the Netherlands found that teachers in urban areas also tend to face diversity among their students, both in terms of ethnicity and socio-cultural background (Gaikhorst et al., 2020), allowing them to build more diverse social relationships. Teachers in urban areas also find it easier to get professional training and face the demands of a more dynamic work environment. On the other hand, teachers in rural areas tend to experience socio-economic difficulties (Khulel, 2021), limited access (Leech et al., 2022; Ling et al., 2020; Zahl-Thanem & Rye, 2024), and rely more on community approaches in building their interpersonal competencies. This finding aligns with Gardner's theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in developing social intelligence (Gardner, 1983). From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study reinforce the concept that interpersonal competence is influenced not only by individual (innate) factors, but also by the work environment and culture. If analyzed using Sternberg's theory, teacher interpersonal competence can be categorized within the practical intelligence dimension. Sternberg explains that practical intelligence refers to a person's ability to adapt to their social environment and solve interpersonal problems effectively (Sternberg, 1984). In this context, professional training attended by IRE teachers in urban areas can be considered a crucial factor in developing teachers' practical intelligence. However, previous research has also shown that leadership policies, facilities, and teacher welfare levels can contribute to the development of interpersonal competence (Amini et al., 2022; Pavlidou & Alevriadou, 2022).

The results of the study also showed that the level of education of the IRE teacher worked affected the teacher's interpersonal competence. IRE teachers in SMA had a higher average score for interpersonal competence than teachers at the TK, SD, and SMP levels.

Interpersonal competencies encompass skills in communication, understanding others' emotions, and fostering positive social relationships (Gardner, 1983). In the context of teachers, the higher the demands for communicating and interacting with students, the greater the opportunities for developing interpersonal competence. Previous studies have shown that students in SMA are in the late adolescent phase, which is characterized by increasingly complex thinking skills. Consequently, teachers in SMA tend to face students with more critical and independent thinking patterns than those at TK, SD, or SMP levels. The learning methods often used in SMA are more discussion-based, case studies, and problem solving (Parmigiani & Murray, 2022; Saputra, 2024), so that teachers are challenged to be able to build more equal relationships with students, emphasize the negotiation aspect, take a more flexible, reflective, and discussion-based communication approach, or argumentation-based communication (Chew & Cerbin, 2021; Ortiz-Revilla et al., 2020; Tesfaye & White, 2012). This differs from teachers at the TK, SD, or SMP education levels, who tend to use instructional communication patterns, one-way interaction patterns with a direct guidance approach, storytelling, and game-based activities, resulting in simpler interpersonal interactions compared to those in SMA. This finding aligns with Gardner's concept of interpersonal intelligence, which posits that the more complex the demands of social interaction, the more the individual's interpersonal competence will develop (Gardner, 1983).

This research produced findings indicating that the average interpersonal intelligence of Islamic Religious Education teachers in urban areas was higher than that of their counterparts in rural areas. In urban schools, teachers have more flexible opportunities to utilize technology in the learning process compared to those in rural areas, as internet facilities are more readily available, making information easier to access. They are required to possess the skills to use technology and integrate it into the learning process. Integrating technology into learning has been proven to produce graduates capable of achieving the learning processes and objectives of Learning Process 4.0 (Zaqiah et al., 2021).

Furthermore, findings from the assignment location indicate that the level of education to which the teacher is assigned is related to the interpersonal intelligence they possess. The higher the educational level of the assigned teacher, the higher the interpersonal intelligence of Islamic Religious Education teachers. Conversely, teachers who teach at the elementary level also have lower interpersonal intelligence. The educational level of the assigned teacher influences the level of interpersonal intelligence of IRE. IRE Teachers who teach at the elementary education level have lower interpersonal intelligence than teachers who teach at the secondary education level. According to the R test analysis, this finding is significant but has weak predictive power; therefore, it is recommended that other factors beyond the scope of this research be tested in the future.

Interpersonal intelligence relates to how individual teachers interact with their social environment, including students, staff, fellow teachers, and leaders. Personal interactions can influence the responses of others. This research primarily focuses on social interactions with students, while also considering fellow teachers, staff, and the principal, as Islamic Education teachers interact more closely with their students. When examining the level of education, IRE teachers who interact with students at the basic education level must adapt to suit the varying intelligence levels of their students. Therefore, it is understandable that the educational level at which the IRE teacher works affects their interpersonal intelligence. The ability of teachers to adapt to the social environment is something to be grateful for, as it demonstrates the professionalism of Islamic Education teachers in their work.

Considering the characteristics of students at the educational level where the teachers work, it appears that the students' intelligence also contributes to enhancing the teachers' interpersonal competence. Operant behaviour occurs in the teaching and learning process between teachers and their students. It is essential to recognize that the higher a student's educational level, the greater their social intelligence becomes through learning experiences. Teaching and learning experience influences the quality and teaching ability of teachers (Al-Abdullatif & Al-Omair, 2024).

This phenomenon confirms that effective two-way communication occurs between teachers and students, depending on the level of education they serve. In social communication theory, this means that the teacher's character influences the students' character, and vice versa, the students' character influences the teacher's character. Difficulty interacting hinders the learning process (Sadiku & Malaj-Abdyli, 2024).

Regarding the findings of this study, it is also evident that the place of work, whether a village or a city, does not significantly influence the level of interpersonal intelligence among IRE teachers. Teachers with low interpersonal intelligence are found in schools in both rural and urban areas. Conversely, Islamic Religious Education teachers with high interpersonal intelligence are found in all schools in both regions. This suggests that there is no correlation between the location of the teacher's workplace and the interpersonal intelligence possessed by the IRE teacher.

Teacher professionalism in teaching encompasses a combination of four competencies: professional, pedagogical, social, and personality competencies. Teachers' interpersonal competence is one aspect of social competence that is important to have, but cannot stand alone perfectly without being supported by other competencies. The teacher's interpersonal competence is supported by the spiritual intelligence that he possesses as a personality characteristic. This finding aligns with previous research, which has demonstrated that spiritual intelligence can facilitate teachers' ability to complete their teaching tasks more effectively (Samad et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study confirms Gardner's concept of interpersonal intelligence by showing that the complexity of social interactions influences the development of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers' interpersonal competencies. The findings reveal evident disparities, with urban teachers demonstrating higher competencies than their rural counterparts, primarily due to broader access to professional networks, more diverse learner interactions, and greater opportunities for training. Similarly, senior high school teachers exhibit stronger competencies than those at lower levels, reflecting the greater communicative demands of their teaching context. These results highlight that interpersonal competence is not solely shaped by individual capacities but also by socio-cultural environments, institutional work cultures, and access to educational resources. The study contributes to the field of Islamic education by providing empirical evidence of regional inequalities and offering insights into the importance of context-sensitive professional development. Policy initiatives should prioritize inclusive education programs, digital training opportunities, and stronger professional networks for teachers to enhance interpersonal competencies, particularly in regions with limited resources. Despite its contributions, the study is limited by its reliance on quantitative self-reported data, which does not capture the influence of teaching experience or other qualitative dimensions. Future

research should adopt mixed-method approaches to provide deeper insights into the development and practice of interpersonal competence among IRE teachers.

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