


# Readiness and Mentoring Needs of Islamic Religious Education Teachers for Academic Competency Test

**A Study in Yogyakarta, Indonesia**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to improve the readiness of Islamic Religious Education teachers in facing the Academic Competency Test through a mentoring program based on the Teacher Working Group and the integration of Al-Islam, Muhammadiyah Studies, and Arabic Language values. The method used is a quantitative descriptive approach supported by qualitative data through a needs assessment questionnaire. The instrument employed a Likert scale with variables including knowledge, teacher readiness, utilization of working group, value integration, mentoring needs, and open-ended questions. The study involved teachers at the elementary school level from 12 Muhammadiyah schools in Yogyakarta City. The analysis results indicate that teachers' level of understanding of test is in the moderate category (mean ≈ 3.00), while their level of readiness remains moderate but tends toward low (mean=2.57), particularly in the aspects of developing question banks (mean=2.08) and conducting competency test-based practice exercises (mean=2.25). Meanwhile, the utilization of working group is also in the moderate category and has not yet been optimized as a platform for competency development based on the academic competency. These findings reveal a gap between teachers' conceptual understanding and their practical readiness, indicating the need for a systematic, collaborative, and needs-based mentoring program. Programs that can be developed include workshops on constructing Higher-Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) questions, mentoring in developing question banks, and strengthening working group as a professional learning community.

**Keywords**
Academic Competency Test
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Mentoring
Teacher Working Group
Value Integration

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## Introduction

Improving the quality of education is a strategic agenda within the national education system, particularly in responding to the dynamics of competency-based assessment such as the Academic Competency Test (ACT). The implementation of ACT requires Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS), meaning that teachers are not only expected to understand the subject matter but also to design learning strategies and assessments that align with these demands [1]-[4].

In addressing these demands, teacher professional development becomes a key factor in enhancing the quality of learning. Teachers need to continuously develop their competencies through collaborative and reflective approaches, enabling them to transform conceptual understanding into effective teaching practices. Professional development does not only focus on improving individual capacity but also on strengthening teacher learning communities that facilitate the continuous exchange of knowledge and best practices [5]-[8].

Therefore, teacher professional development plays a crucial role in ensuring that teachers possess adequate competencies to meet the demands of ACT. Effective professional development should be designed to be sustainable, practice-oriented, and collaborative, so that it can support teachers in translating conceptual understanding into learning and assessment practices that are aligned with HOTS and ACT requirements [2],[7],[9]-[11].

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teacher have an important role in shaping both the academic competencies and character of students. In Muhammadiyah schools, IRE learning is integrated within the ISMUBA system (Al-Islam, Muhammadiyah Studies, and Arabic Language), which has its own distinctive characteristics. However, in the context of competency-based learning demands such as ACT, the integration of ISMUBA has not been fully directed toward supporting students' readiness for ACT. This indicates that although the strengthening of values and character has been well implemented, its linkage with strengthening HOTS-based academic competencies is still not optimal [2],[12].

On the other hand, teacher forums such as the Subject Teacher Consultation (STC) for junior secondary school, senior secondary school, and vocational secondary school teachers and the Teacher Working Group (TWG), which is more specific to elementary teachers, have great potential as platforms for teacher professional development. Both MGMP and TWG can function as professional learning communities that enhance teacher competence through collaboration and the sharing of best practices. However, in practice, the utilization of TWG in supporting ACT readiness has not yet been optimal [5],[3]-[19]. Based on these conditions, a needs-based

mentoring program is required to improve teachers' readiness in facing ACT through strengthening TWG and integrating ISMUBA. This research is an initial stage (pre-service) which aims to identify the readiness and needs of teacher mentoring as a basis for developing a mentoring program in the next implementation stage.

## Methods

This study employed a survey research design using a quantitative descriptive approach supported by qualitative data. The study involved 12 IRE teachers from 12 elementary schools across Yogyakarta City. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling based on their involvement in TWG of IRE activities. Data were collected through a needs assessment questionnaire consisting of 25 statement items using a 4-point Likert scale, along with open-ended questions to obtain more in-depth information regarding teachers' challenges and needs. The variables examined included knowledge of ACT, IRE teacher readiness, utilization of TWG of IRE, ISMUBA integration, and mentoring needs. The instrument is compiled based on indicators of teacher readiness and mentoring needs and is validated constructively through expert judgment. Data analysis in this study employed a descriptive statistical approach by calculating the mean score for each item and variable [20]. The measurement scale referred to the Likert scale developed by Rensis Likert to assess respondents' perceptions. Open-ended question data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques through a process of data reduction, categorization, and interpretation. The data were then categorized into high, moderate, and low criteria based on score classification concepts [21]. In addition, a needs assessment approach was used to identify the gap between actual and expected conditions, referring to the framework developed by [22]. Gap analysis was further conducted to strengthen data interpretation [23].

## Results

Based on the results of the online questionnaire, it was found that 67% of respondents are senior teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience, while the remaining 33% have teaching experience ranging from 5 to 10 years. All respondents are non-ASN teachers who are actively involved in the TWG.

### A. Results of Teachers' Needs Analysis

Based on the results of the teachers' needs analysis, the findings are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Results of teachers' needs analysis

| Variable | Mean | Category |
|---|---|---|
| ACT Understanding | 3.00 | Moderate |
| Teacher Readiness | 2.57 | Moderate (tending to low) |
| TWG | 2.95 | Moderate |
| ISMUBA | 3.17 | Moderate (approaching high) |

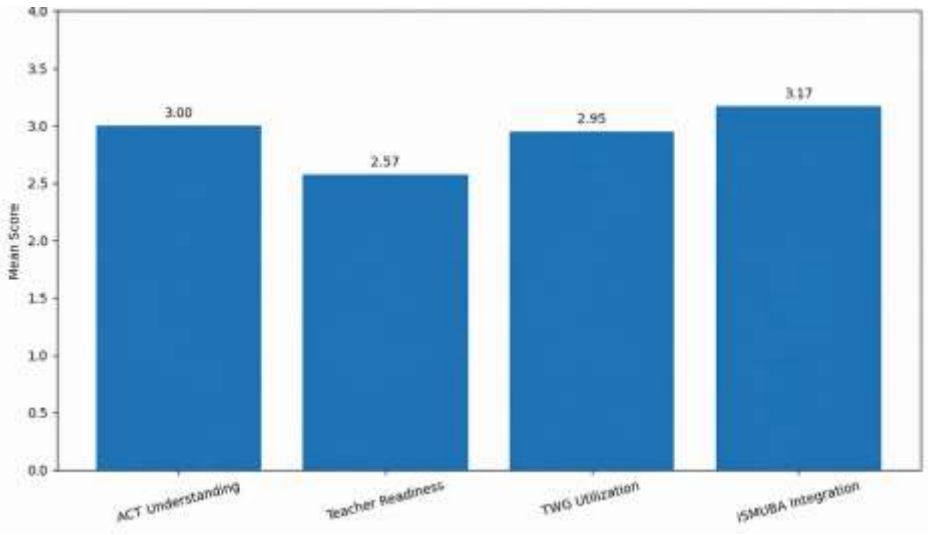



**Fig. 1.** Mean Scores of Key Indicators of IRE Teachers' Readiness for ACT

Fig. 1 shows the mean scores of the four key indicators related to teachers' readiness for ACT. ISMUBA integration obtained the highest mean score (3.17), followed by ACT understanding (3.00) and TWG utilization (2.95). Teacher readiness recorded the lowest mean score (2.57), indicating that teachers' practical readiness was relatively weaker than their understanding of ACT and the utilization of TWG and ISMUBA integration.

**Table 2.** Item-Level Needs Assessment of IRE Teachers

| Variable | Item/Indicator | Mean |
|---|---|---|
| ACT Understanding | 1. Understanding the concept of ACT for IRE | 2.92 |
| | 2. Knowledge of the purpose of ACT | 3.08 |
| | 3. Understanding the forms and types of ACT questions | 3.00 |
| | 4. Knowledge of competencies assessed in ACT | 3.00 |
| | 5. Understanding ACT graduation standards | 3.00 |
| | 6. Alignment of teaching modules with ACT requirements | 2.83 |
| | 7. Use of learning strategies supporting ACT achievement | 2.83 |
| | 8. Regular provision of ACT-based practice exercises | **2.25** |
| Teacher Readiness | 9. Implementation of HOTS-based learning assessment | 2.67 |
| | 10. Readiness to face ACT implementation | 2.75 |
| | 11. Availability of a ACT question bank for students | **2.08** |
| TWG Utilization | 12. Active participation in IRE TWG activities | 2.92 |
| | 13. TWG support in understanding ACT | 2.83 |
| | 14. TWG as a forum for sharing ACT questions and strategies | 2.83 |
| | 15. TWG discussions in improving teacher competence | 3.17 |
| | 16. Effectiveness of TWG in supporting ACT readiness | 3.00 |
| ISMUBA Integration | 17. Integration of Al-Islam values in learning | 3.33 |
| | 18. Integration of Muhammadiyah values in learning | 3.33 |
| | 19. Integration of Arabic Language in IRE learning | 3.00 |
| | 20. Contribution of ISMUBA materials to students' ACT readiness | 3.08 |
| | 21. Use of an integrated approach in ISMUBA | 3.33 |
| Mentoring Needs | 22. Need for specialized ACT training | 3.42 |

| Variable | Item/Indicator | Mean |
|---|---|---|
| | 23. Need for mentoring in developing ACT questions | 3.42 |
| | 24. Need for examples of ACT-based learning models | 3.42 |
| | 25. Need for learning media relevant to ACT | 3.42 |

Table 2 provides a detailed item-level overview of the teachers' needs assessment. The lowest mean score was found for the availability of a ACT question bank (M = 2.08), followed by the regular provision of ACT-based practice exercises (M = 2.25). These findings indicate that teachers' main challenges are not limited to understanding ACT conceptually but also involve translating that understanding into practical assessment activities. In contrast, the highest scores were observed for the need for specialized ACT training, mentoring in developing ACT questions, examples of ACT-based learning models, and relevant learning media (all M = 3.42). These findings provide a clear basis for developing a practical and needs-based mentoring program.

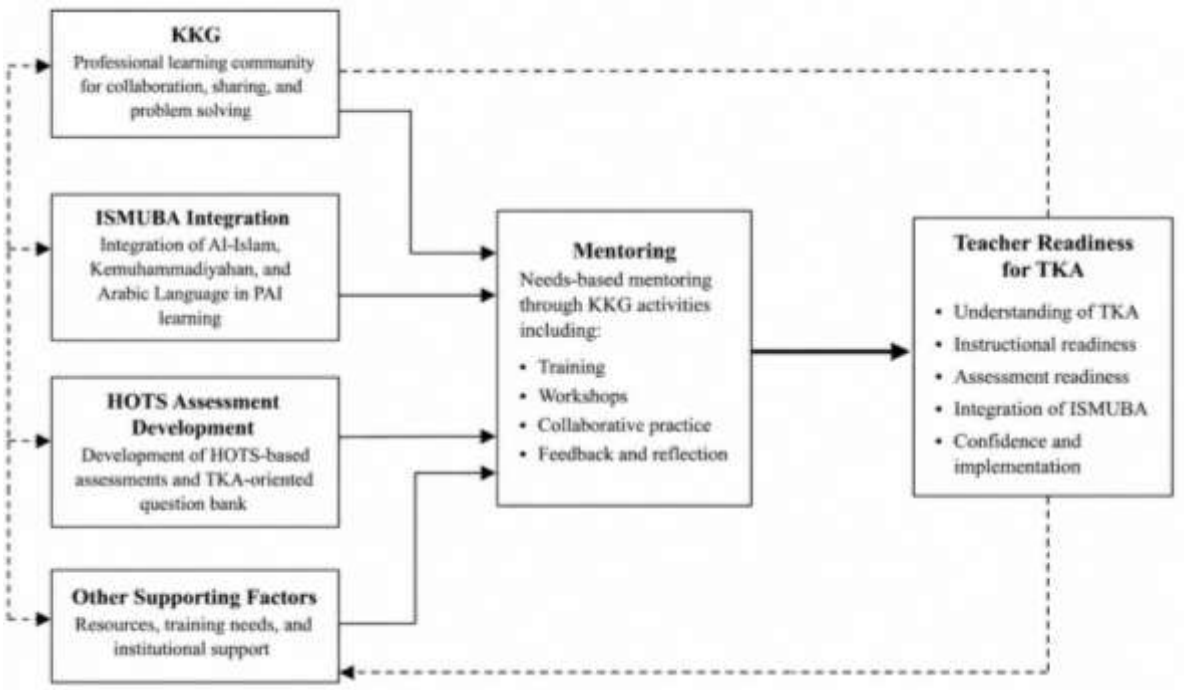



**Fig. 2**. Proposed Conceptual Framework for Enhancing IRE Teachers' Readiness for ACT

Fig. 2 illustrates that mentoring serves as the connecting mechanism through which TWG, ISMUBA integration, and HOTS-based assessment development are expected to contribute to teachers' readiness for ACT. These findings indicate that although teachers have a relatively adequate understanding of ACT, their readiness for implementation in instructional practice remains suboptimal. This reflects a gap between conceptual understanding and practical application. Teachers have not been fully able to transform their knowledge into effective teaching and assessment practices, particularly in the development of HOTS-based questions and learning strategies aligned with ACT requirements.

## B. Gap Analysis

The findings of this study reveal a significant gap between teachers' conceptual understanding and their practical readiness in facing the ACT. Although teachers demonstrate a relatively good level of understanding of the concepts and objectives of ACT, their readiness in terms of instructional implementation and assessment remains low. This suggests that teachers' understanding has not yet been fully translated into practical competencies that can be effectively applied in classroom instruction.

This gap is clearly reflected in the low scores for the provision of question banks (mean = 2.08) and the implementation of ACT-based practice exercises (mean = 2.25). In fact, both are key components in preparing students for competency-based assessments. The low performance in these two aspects indicates that teachers still face limitations in designing assessment instruments that align with ACT characteristics, particularly in developing Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)-based questions and constructing systematic question banks.

This condition not only affects the limited intensity of students' practice in dealing with ACT-type questions but also has implications for the suboptimal implementation of learning processes oriented toward strengthening higher-order thinking skills [3],[24],[25]. Therefore, this gap between understanding and practice has the potential to hinder students' overall readiness to face ACT comprehensively.

Thus, systematic and sustainable interventions are needed through mentoring programs that not only focus on strengthening conceptual aspects but also emphasize improving teachers' practical competencies. Such mentoring should be directed toward developing practical skills, including constructing HOTS-based questions, developing question banks, and implementing learning strategies aligned with ACT demands, in order to effectively bridge the gap between understanding and practice [1],[2],[25]-[27].

## C. The Role of TWG and ISMUBA

TWG has strategic potential as a professional learning community that can serve as a driving force for improving teacher competence in a collaborative and sustainable manner. However, the findings of this study indicate that this potential has not been optimally utilized in supporting teachers' readiness to face ACT. TWG activities still tend to be general and administrative in nature and have not been specifically directed toward strengthening competencies such as developing HOTS-based questions, constructing question banks, and implementing ACT-oriented learning strategies.

On the other hand, the implementation of ISMUBA in learning has been carried out relatively well, particularly in terms of internalizing values and shaping students' character. However, this integration has not been systematically oriented toward supporting academic achievement in the

context of ACT. This condition reflects a dichotomy between value reinforcement and the strengthening of academic competencies, which ideally should be integrated synergistically.

Therefore, a mentoring design is needed that integrates the role of TWG as a professional learning community with a value-based ISMUBA approach. Such integration is expected to create learning that is not only character-oriented but also capable of enhancing students' academic readiness in facing ACT [5],[12],[28].

**D. Implications for the Mentoring Program**

Based on the results of the needs analysis, the mentoring program is systematically designed to address the actual needs of teachers in the field. The main focus of this program includes strengthening teachers' competencies in developing Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS)-based questions through practical workshops, enabling teachers not only to understand but also to apply the development of assessment instruments aligned with the characteristics of ACT. In addition, the mentoring is directed toward the development of structured and sustainable ACT question banks as an effort to enhance teachers' readiness in providing high-quality practice materials for students [1],[2],[27].

On the other hand, this program also emphasizes strengthening the role of TWG as a Professional Learning Community that serves as a platform for collaboration, sharing best practices, and continuous teacher competency development. Furthermore, the integration of ISMUBA values into ACT-based learning strategies becomes an essential component of this mentoring design, ensuring that learning is not only oriented toward academic achievement but also maintains Islamic and Muhammadiyah values. Thus, the designed mentoring program is expected to comprehensively and sustainably address the gap between teachers' understanding and their practical readiness [1],[2],[27].

**E. Respondent Profile and Its Implications for Teacher Readiness**

These findings are further reinforced by the characteristics of the respondents, which show that the majority of teachers are senior teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience (67%), while the remaining respondents have 5–10 years of experience. Theoretically, extensive teaching experience should correlate with greater maturity in pedagogical and professional competence. However, the results of this study indicate that teachers' implementation readiness in facing ACT is still not optimal. This suggests that teaching experience does not automatically guarantee teachers' readiness to respond to the evolving demands of competency-based assessment [7],[8],[29],[30].

In addition, all respondents are non-ASN teachers who are active in TWG as a platform for professional development. Active participation in TWG should serve as a strategic means to enhance teacher competence through collaboration and the exchange of best practices. However,

the findings reveal that the utilization of TWG has not been fully optimized in supporting teachers' readiness to face ACT. This condition indicates that teacher professionalism has been structurally established but has not been fully actualized functionally in teaching and assessment practices. Thus, these findings not only reflect a gap between understanding and implementation readiness but also show that teaching experience and participation in professional communities alone are insufficient to ensure teacher readiness without systematic support and continuous mentoring [31]-[33].

Based on these findings, interventions in the form of a mentoring program are needed, designed systematically, collaboratively, and based on teachers' needs. The mentoring program should focus on strengthening practical competencies, such as developing HOTS-based questions, constructing question banks, and implementing learning strategies aligned with ACT requirements. In addition, strengthening TWG as a professional learning community needs to be optimized so that it can function as a collaborative space for teachers to share best practices and continuously improve their competencies. Thus, the proposed mentoring program is expected to bridge the gap between understanding and practice and enhance teachers' readiness to face ACT more comprehensively. The findings of this study form the basis for developing the mentoring program design in the next stage of community service.

## Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that the readiness of IRE teachers in facing ACT remains in the moderate category, tending toward low, particularly in practical implementation aspects such as developing question banks and conducting ACT-based practice exercises. However, teachers' level of conceptual understanding of ACT is relatively good, indicating a gap between understanding and practical readiness. On the other hand, teachers' need for mentoring programs is categorized as high, reflecting the urgency of strengthening their practical competencies. Therefore, a mentoring program is needed that is systematically designed, collaborative, and based on teachers' needs, by leveraging the role of TWG as a Professional Learning Community and integrating ISMUBA values into the learning process. This program is expected to bridge the gap between understanding and practice, as well as to sustainably improve teachers' readiness in facing ACT. However, this research has not yet reached the mentoring implementation stage, so the effectiveness of the program cannot be measured. However, this research has not yet reached the mentoring implementation stage, so the effectiveness of the program cannot be measured.

## Limitation and Suggestions

This study has several limitations, particularly in terms of the number and characteristics of respondents, which are limited to non-ASN teachers who are active in TWG within a specific area. Therefore, the generalization of findings should be approached with caution. Moreover, the data used are primarily descriptive and questionnaire-based, which may not fully capture actual classroom practices in depth. Future studies are therefore recommended to involve a larger and more diverse sample, employ mixed-method approaches, and examine the direct implementation of mentoring programs to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of improving teacher readiness in facing ACT.

Based on the research findings, several recommendations can be proposed, particularly for practitioners and future researchers. For future community service implementers, mentoring programs should be further developed through direct implementation in the field, accompanied by evaluations of program effectiveness using more comprehensive research designs, such as pre-test and post-test, to more accurately measure improvements in teacher competence. For future researchers, it is recommended to examine more deeply the effectiveness of the developed mentoring model, including exploring its impact on improving students' learning outcomes in ACT. In addition, future studies may expand their scope by incorporating other variables, such as institutional support, teacher motivation, and the integration of technology in ACT-based learning.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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