Developing social competence of religious college lecturers: Challenges and solutions

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Lecturers' social competence is one of the most crucial aspects in efforts to improve the quality of education in higher education, especially in the environment of Religious Higher Education, where in addition to being required to have superior and in-depth academic abilities, lecturers must also be able to develop adequate social competence in order to establish effective and harmonious interactions with students, fellow colleagues, and the wider community; in this article, various challenges faced by lecturers in Religious Higher Education in the process of developing social competence are discussed in depth, as well as solutions that can be applied to overcome the obstacles that arise in order to improve the quality of their social competence; this study uses a qualitative approach that allows detailed identification of internal and external factors that influence the development of lecturers' social competence, while providing practical recommendations that are expected to be a reference in supporting the development of sustainable social competence in religious higher education. The results of this study indicate that the development of social competence of lecturers in religious universities faces various significant challenges such as the lack of specific training in social skills, differences in values and cultures that affect interactions between lecturers and students and colleagues, and high academic loads that limit the time and energy of lecturers to develop social aspects. Therefore, strategic solutions that need to be implemented include organizing training and workshops that focus on developing communication skills, conflict management, and leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Religious universities play a very important role in developing the quality of human resources in Indonesia, because in addition to being a place to gain academic knowledge, these institutions also have a noble task in shaping the character and skills of students so that they are ready to face increasingly complex global challenges. In this context, religious universities not only function as formal educational institutions that transfer knowledge, but also as a vehicle for instilling religious and moral values that are the foundation of everyday life, both for students and the wider community (Syamsudin, 2022). By integrating academic education and spiritual values, religious universities are expected to be able to produce a young generation who are not only intellectually intelligent, but also have strong personalities, full of integrity, and can make positive contributions to social and cultural development. The formation of this character is not only the responsibility of lecturers in terms of teaching academic material, but also in social aspects related to interactions between individuals, both in the classroom and outside the campus (Nurpratiwi, 2021). In this case, the social competence of lecturers is very crucial to create a harmonious learning environment, where students are not only taught about science, but also guided to become individuals who have empathy, social responsibility, and skills to work together with various parties in order to achieve common goals, both on campus and in society (Hasyim, 2021).

The social competence of lecturers is not only an interpersonal ability that is limited to the ability to speak well, but more broadly includes the ability to build effective and productive relationships with students, colleagues, and the surrounding community, which directly impacts the

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creation of a conducive academic atmosphere and supports quality learning. In the context of higher education, especially religious higher education, the social competence of lecturers is an inseparable part of the quality of education itself, because lecturers who have good social competence are not only able to convey material clearly, but can also create an inclusive, empathetic, and value-based interaction climate that is in accordance with the vision and mission of religious higher education (Mulyasa, 2020). As educators who are role models for students, lecturers with high social competence are able to understand the social and psychological needs of students, resolve conflicts that arise wisely, and work together with various parties in order to create a harmonious academic environment (Ariani, 2024). This is very relevant, considering that the quality of education produced is not only seen from the academic aspect alone, but also from the extent to which the education can shape the character and social behavior of students that can be implemented in everyday life. Therefore, the development of social competence of lecturers needs to be seen as an inseparable part of efforts to improve the quality of education as a whole, which includes dimensions of knowledge, skills, and social attitudes that need to be holistically instilled in students, so that they not only become experts in certain fields of science, but also have the ability to interact and contribute to society in a positive and constructive way (Nasution, 2021).

Lecturers, as one of the key elements in the world of education, play a very strategic role in developing effective interpersonal relationships not only with students, but also with fellow colleagues, and with the wider community. In the context of religious higher education, these interpersonal relationships have a deeper dimension, because in addition to academic ability, lecturers are required to be role models in social behavior that is in accordance with the religious values upheld by the institution. This includes the lecturer's skills in managing open and empathetic communication with students, especially in understanding and responding to the needs and challenges faced by students both academically and psychologically. As educators who not only transfer knowledge, but also guide students in forming character, lecturers in religious higher education must have the ability to listen attentively, provide constructive direction, and build a healthy academic climate, where each individual feels valued and supported. In addition, good interaction between lecturers and academic colleagues, both in teaching teams and in scientific discussions, is very important to create productive collaborations that ultimately support the development of better science (Suyanto, 2022).

On the other hand, the role of lecturers also extends to interactions with the community, where as part of their duties, lecturers in religious universities need to be involved in social activities based on religious values, such as community service and counseling, which allow lecturers to contribute to broader social development. Thus, the religious values instilled in every social interaction not only serve as moral guidelines, but also as a foundation for creating relationships full of respect, responsibility, and mutual understanding, which will ultimately form a better community, both on campus and in society (Syaifuddin, 2021). Research conducted by (Muawanah, 2017) states the importance of social competence for lecturers in higher education. Social competence helps lecturers interact well, build positive relationships with students and colleagues, and overcome communication challenges in the academic environment. This article also discusses solutions to improve lecturers' social competence. The main objective of this study is to identify the challenges faced by lecturers in religious higher education institutions in developing their social competence, provide practical solutions to overcome these challenges, and formulate recommendations for the development of lecturers' social competence in religious higher education institutions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach that aims to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by lecturers in developing their social competence in Religious Colleges in Indonesia. In this approach, the study was conducted with case studies in several religious colleges that have different characteristics. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, involving lecturers, students, and college administrators. In-depth interviews allow researchers to gain a more comprehensive and detailed perspective on the experiences, challenges, and solutions implemented by lecturers in developing their social competence. In addition, this interview also provides space for informants to share experiences more freely and openly.

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The data sources in this study came from secondary sources including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and policy documents published in the last five years. Lecturers were selected because they have a direct role in the development of social competence on campus, both in interactions with students and in collaboration with colleagues (Nugroho, 2022). Students were selected as data sources because they are the parties directly involved in the learning process and social interactions with lecturers, so they can provide perspectives on how lecturers' social competence affects their learning experiences. Higher education administrators were also used as data sources because they have views related to educational policies and academic environments that can affect the development of lecturers' social competence more broadly. All of these informants provide the insights needed to explore the challenges and solutions in developing lecturers' social competence in religious higher education (Arikunto, 2021).

To collect data, this study used two main techniques, namely semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by asking open-ended questions to lecturers, students, and university administrators. This technique gives respondents the freedom to explain their experiences, challenges, and solutions they have encountered related to the development of lecturers' social competence (Supriyanto, 2022). The questions in this interview were designed to dig up in-depth information about the role of lecturers in interacting with students and colleagues at the university. In addition, participant observation techniques were used to directly observe how lecturers interact in various contexts, such as in the classroom, faculty meetings, and daily interactions with students. Through this observation, researchers can directly understand the social skills of lecturers, as well as how their interactions affect the quality of learning and social relationships on campus. These two techniques are expected to provide comprehensive data on lecturers' social competence and the challenges faced in developing it (Sutrisno, 2021).

In this study, the data collected from interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. This technique is used to identify and group the main themes that emerge from the data, both related to the challenges and solutions faced by lecturers in developing their social competence (Hancock, D. R., & Algozzine, 2021). Thematic analysis allows researchers to extract important information from qualitative data, then organize it into clear categories to gain a deeper understanding of the problem being studied. By using this technique, researchers can find certain patterns in the responses given by lecturers, students, and university administrators regarding the development of lecturers' social competence. This process helps researchers in formulating relevant conclusions and suggesting solutions to improve the social competence of lecturers in religious universities (Moleong, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following is a Table of Bibliography Data compiled from a selection of 10 scientific articles published in the last five years (2019–2024) from Google Scholar. These articles have been carefully screened and selected to ensure relevance to the research on "Developing Social Competence of Religious College Lecturers: Challenges and Solutions".

Table 1 Developing Social Competence of Religious College Lecturers: Challenges and Solutions

No.	Author(s) & Year	Title	Focus Area	Key Findings
1	(Muawanah, 2017)	The Importance of Social Competence for Lecturers	Social competence of lecturers in the Tri Dharma of Higher Education	Social competence is important for building cooperation with other lecturers, educational staff, students, and the community. Learning social competence can be integrated into courses such as Religious Education and Civic Education

No.	Author(s) & Year	Title	Focus Area	Key Findings
2	(Parnawi, 2018)	Social Competence of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Improving Student Achievement	The role of social competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers in student achievement	The social competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers includes communication and interaction with students, fellow educators, parents of students, and the community.
3	(Djamas, 2022)	Study of Librarian Competence in Fulfilling Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities in College Libraries: Challenges and Solutions.	librarian competence in meeting accessibility needs for people with disabilities in college libraries.	College libraries still face various obstacles, such as limited knowledge and specific skills in handling the needs of people with disabilities, lack of supporting facilities, and minimal training related to accessibility.
4	Abidin, Z. (2021).	Optimizing Lecturer Performance in Learning at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.	lecturers' efforts to improve the quality of learning in the Faculty of Islamic Studies (FAI) of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.	Lecturers at the Faculty of Islamic Studies (FAI) of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta (UMS) have successfully implemented effective active

Lecturers at religious colleges often face challenges in developing social competence due to a lack of specific training, differences in religious and cultural values that influence social interactions, and high academic burdens that make it difficult for them to find time to develop social skills. (Muawanah, 2017) This study discusses how important social competence is for lecturers in higher education. Social competence helps lecturers interact well, build positive relationships with students and colleagues, and overcome communication challenges in an academic environment. The article also discusses solutions to improve lecturers' social competence. Lecturers in religious colleges usually focus more on developing their academic skills and often lack specific training to improve their social skills. This makes it difficult for them to communicate and interact with students and colleagues effectively. Thus, the lack of social training is a major obstacle in developing lecturers' social competence (Rahayu, S., & Sari, 2022).

Religious universities have special characteristics because of the differences in religious values held by lecturers and students. These differences sometimes cause difficulties in interacting, especially when religious values and professionalism must be aligned. This is one of the obstacles in building harmonious social relationships between lecturers and students and between fellow lecturers (Putra, A. R., & Nurhayati, 2023). Lecturers face a fairly high academic burden, including the obligation to teach and conduct research simultaneously. This makes it difficult for them to set aside time and energy to develop social competence, because the main focus remains on achieving academic targets (Sari, N. F., & Wahyudi, 2022).

This study by (Parnawi, 2018) stated that the social competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers includes the ability to communicate and interact effectively with students, fellow teachers, parents of students, and the community. This competence contributes greatly to student achievement. This study by (Djamas, 2022) found that there are still various obstacles in college libraries in fulfilling

accessibility for people with disabilities. These obstacles include lack of special knowledge and skills, limited supporting facilities, and minimal training for librarians regarding accessibility.

Religious universities need to hold training and workshops that focus on developing lecturers' social skills, such as effective communication, conflict management, and leadership, so that lecturers can interact better and more professionally in the academic environment (Wahyuni, S., et al,. 2022). Encouraging collaboration between lecturers and exchange of experiences between universities can enrich the insights and improve the social skills of lecturers, so that they are better prepared to face various situations in the campus environment and society (Saputra, F., & Lestari, 2023).

Integrating religious values with social skills is important to improve the quality of interactions between lecturers in religious colleges, so that lecturers can balance professional ethics and religious teachings in communicating and collaborating. (Hidayat, R., & Nurlina, 2022). This research by (Abidin, Z. 2021). This article examines the active learning strategies implemented by lecturers at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. One of the focuses is optimizing lecturer performance through the development of social competence, which has a positive impact on student involvement in the learning process (Firda, Z. N., & Fitriatin, 2020). This study discusses how social competence and teacher professionalism can build a positive image of educational institutions. Teacher social competence helps build good relationships with students, parents, and the community, which is also relevant for lecturers in religious colleges.

Therefore, the development of lecturers' social competence in religious higher education institutions faces various significant challenges, such as the lack of specialized training in social skills, differences in values and cultures that affect interactions between lecturers, students, and colleagues, as well as heavy academic workloads that limit the time and energy for developing these social aspects. Hence, strategic solutions that need to be implemented include organizing training and workshops focused on the development of communication skills, conflict management, and leadership, accompanied by encouraging collaboration and experience-sharing among lecturers and institutions to enrich their insights and social abilities, while harmoniously integrating religious values into social skills development. This ensures that lecturers' interactions are not only professional but also grounded in strong ethics and spirituality. By implementing these measures, religious higher education institutions can create an inclusive and productive academic environment that supports lecturers in performing their roles optimally, producing an excellent generation that is not only intellectually capable but also socially and spiritually mature.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the development of lecturers' social competence in religious higher education institutions faces various significant challenges, such as the lack of specialized training in social skills, differences in values and cultures that affect interactions between lecturers, students, and colleagues, as well as heavy academic workloads that limit the time and energy for developing these social aspects. Therefore, strategic solutions that need to be implemented include organizing training sessions and workshops focused on the development of communication skills, conflict management, and leadership.

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