Communicative Competence of Early Childhood Islamic Education Students: The Synergy between Islamic Pedagogy and Modern Communication Studies

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Abstract

Background:Recent scholarship highlights communicative competence as a foundational dimension of teacher professionalism; however, within Islamic Early Childhood Education, its conceptualization remains fragmented, often limited to surface-level linguistic or performative skills. This narrow treatment obscures the ethical, dialogic, and digital dimensions necessary for cultivating educators capable of navigating contemporary pedagogical demands while remaining grounded in Islamic value frameworks. **Research Objectives:**This study investigates the multidimensional constitution of communicative competence among prospective Islamic early childhood teachers and seeks to theorize an integrative framework, Islamic Educommunication Competence—that synthesizes spiritual–moral ethics, dialogic interaction, and critical digital literacy. **Methods:** Using an interpretivist qualitative design, data were collected from 60 participants through semi-structured interviews, sustained classroom observations, and document analysis of teaching artifacts. A hybrid inductive–deductive thematic analysis was applied, supported by iterative coding validation and intercoder reliability to ensure analytic rigor. **Results:** The analysis reveals that communicative competence emerges through three interdependent domains: (1) *ethical–spiritual orientation*, characterized by adab, sincerity, and moral intentionality; (2) *dialogic and sociocultural mediation*, reflected in collaborative reasoning, reflective discourse, and contextual sensitivity shaped by local Islamic cultural practices; and (3) *critical digital engagement*, which enables ethical, multimodal, and audience-responsive communication. Together, these domains articulate a theoretical expansion of communicative competence beyond linguistic ability. **Conclusions:** The study advances a conceptual model of Islamic Educommunication Competence that repositions communicative ability as an ethical–dialogic construct embedded within digital ecologies. This model offers significant implications for teacher education curricula seeking to integrate Islamic ethics with contemporary communication practices. Future research should examine the model's transferability across broader Islamic education contexts and its empirical impact on classroom outcomes.

Keywords: communicative competence; Islamic educommunication; dialogic pedagogy; spiritual ethics in education; digital literacy in teacher preparation

Introduction

The rapid acceleration of digital culture has created unprecedented pressures on the communicative capacities of prospective Islamic early childhood educators. Communication within Islamic educational settings can no longer be reduced to the delivery of verbal content; instead, it now requires ethical sensitivity, dialogic awareness, and digital adaptability. Global educational reports show that teachers are increasingly required to navigate multimodal interaction, negotiate meaning with digital-native learners, and respond to moral and social issues with cultural and religious sensitivity (Antoninis et al., 2023; Skantz-Åberg et al., 2022). In Islamic teacher education, these pressures become more complex as educators must integrate adab, compassion, and spiritual intentionality into communication practices shaped by rapidly evolving digital ecologies (Azra, 2021; Lahmar, 2024). These dynamics indicate fundamental shifts in how communicative competence is understood and enacted within Islamic early childhood education.

While scholarship on teacher communicative competence has expanded significantly, most existing studies focus on linguistic performance, pedagogical clarity, or classroom management strategies. International research has tended to conceptualize communication through the lenses of instructional effectiveness and interactional fluency, whereas studies in Islamic education have emphasized the moral aims of communication without systematically analyzing its structural components (Barbany, 2020; Hyland, 2004; Kamali, 2008). Although previous research acknowledges that communication is shaped by cultural, religious, and digital factors (Campbell, 2017; Hiver et al., 2020; Lu & Anumba, 2025; Lundby & Evolvi, 2021; Vohidova, 2024) little is known about how these domains intersect to form communicative competence among prospective Islamic teachers. A critical gap therefore remains: the literature lacks a multidimensional analysis of communicative competence that integrates ethical–spiritual foundations, dialogic pedagogies, and digital literacies within Islamic education.

This study seeks to address this gap by mapping the forms, processes, and conditions through which communicative competence emerges among prospective teachers of Islamic Early Childhood Education. The contemporary Islamic educational context demands communication practices that are pedagogically effective, ethically grounded, culturally responsive, and digitally literate. Accordingly, this research not only identifies the core components of communicative competence but also analyzes how spiritual ethics, dialogic interaction, and digital engagement interact to shape that competence. By doing so, the study provides both an empirical mapping of communicative practices and an analytical account of the mechanisms through which such practices are formed, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

The study advances the argument that shifts in communicative competence arise from structural pressures produced by religious–ethical norms, pedagogical expectations, and digital environments. These forces collectively reshape how prospective teachers conceptualize, perform, and internalize communication in Islamic classrooms. Preliminary findings indicate that Islamic ethical frameworks structure the moral intention of

communication, dialogic practices shape interactional processes, and digital platforms structure the modes through which communication is produced and delivered. At the institutional level, teacher education programs serve as mediating spaces where these domains converge. Thus, communicative competence among prospective Islamic early childhood educators emerges as the product of intertwined ethical, institutional, and digital structures that frame their pedagogical identity and communicative practice.

Previous studies have not examined communicative competence through an integrated theoretical perspective. However, no existing studies have theorised communicative competence at the intersection of Islamic ethics, dialogic pedagogy, and digital communication. This study addresses this theoretical gap by developing the Islamic Educommunication Competence Model, which reconceptualises communicative competence as an ethical–dialogic–digital construct embedded in Islamic value frameworks. Through this lens, the study positions communicative competence not merely as a technical or linguistic skill, but as a holistic educational construct with strong ethical, relational, and digital foundations.

Methods

This study examined the communicative practices of prospective teachers in Islamic Early Childhood Education programs situated in a state Islamic higher education institution in Indonesia. The material object of the research consisted of teaching interactions, classroom communication activities, learning dialogues, and pedagogical documents produced during the instructional process. The participants were final year students enrolled in courses that emphasize communication and pedagogy, and they were selected because they represent the stage at which communicative competence is expected to mature before professional placement. The institutional context was also relevant because it places strong emphasis on the integration of Islamic ethics, dialogic learning, and digital communication within teacher education.

A qualitative interpretivist design was employed to understand communicative competence as a socially constructed and value laden phenomenon. This design was chosen because the research questions required an exploration of meaning, intentionality, and interaction that cannot be captured through numerical data alone. The qualitative orientation made it possible to investigate how ethical awareness, dialogic sensitivity, and digital practices shape communication in authentic educational contexts. This approach aligns with descriptive analytical traditions in teacher education research that prioritize depth of understanding rather than hypothesis testing.

The study used several data sources to achieve a rich and complete understanding of the phenomenon. These included sixty prospective teachers who served as the primary respondents, lecturers and communication instructors who contributed as key informants, and institutional documents such as lesson plans, instructional materials, student reflections, and curriculum guidelines. The combination of human data and textual data provided opportunities to examine both personal experiences and institutional structures that influence the formation of communicative competence.

Data collection was conducted through non participant classroom observations, semi structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations were carried out to capture natural communication patterns in classroom settings and to document how students interacted, negotiated meaning, and used digital media during learning activities. Interviews

explored participants understanding of communicative competence and their perceptions of ethical, dialogic, and digital influences on their communication practices. Document analysis allowed the researcher to identify how communication values and expectations were embedded in teaching materials and institutional policies. This multi method process strengthened the credibility of the findings.

Data analysis followed a staged thematic procedure that combined inductive and deductive strategies. In the inductive phase, recurring patterns were identified directly from the data, particularly those related to moral orientation, dialogic engagement, and digital communication practices. In the deductive phase, theoretical concepts from communicative competence research, dialogic pedagogy, and digital literacy served as guiding lenses. The analysis proceeded through open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, followed by the synthesis of thematic clusters. To ensure consistency and reliability, intercoder agreement was examined through repeated coding sessions. The final analytic structure explains how ethical values, pedagogical interactions, and digital environments collectively shape the communicative competence of prospective Islamic early childhood educators.

Results and Discussion
Results

The analysis produced four major themes that describe how communicative competence develops among prospective Islamic early childhood educators. These themes emerged from repeated patterns in interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings are presented in an integrated narrative to reveal the structural and experiential elements that shape the communication practices of participants.

The first theme concerns the role of ethical and spiritual orientation in communication. Participants repeatedly described communication as an act that requires inner calm, sincerity, and respect. They used expressions such as amanah and soft speech to explain how they prepare themselves before speaking. Observations confirmed this orientation, as students paused briefly before presenting ideas and showed a consistent effort to maintain respectful body language. These findings indicate that ethical awareness is not an abstract concept but a lived foundation that shapes how participants express themselves, listen to others, and respond in classroom conversations.

The second theme highlights the importance of dialogic engagement. Classroom observations showed active exchanges of ideas, collaborative questions, and peer support. Students often repeated each other words to clarify meaning and asked for additional explanation before responding. During interviews, participants explained that dialogic interaction made them more confident, helped them organise thoughts, and encouraged them to express disagreement with courtesy. These data show that dialogic practice functions as a training ground where communicative ability is shaped through shared meaning making. The third theme reveals the influence of digital communication practices. Participants produced learning materials using simple video recordings, images, and digital slides. They reflected on their choices of visuals and sound and mentioned that communication through digital media required careful attention to message clarity, audience understanding, and ethical considerations. Observations of classroom activities confirmed that students used digital tools not only for presenting content but also for shaping the style and tone of their communication. This shows that digital environments provide new conditions that guide how messages are designed and delivered.

The fourth theme concerns institutional structure. Course syllabi, learning instructions, and assessment rubrics consistently linked communication performance with Islamic values and professional expectations. Students reported that assignments required them to demonstrate both communication clarity and ethical grounding. Document analysis confirmed that the institution emphasises communication as part of character formation in teacher education. This shows that communicative competence grows within an institutional environment that sets expectations and provides structured opportunities for practice.

To synthesise these findings, the study produced an integrative model that explains how communicative competence is formed through the interaction of ethical foundation, dialogic process, digital engagement, and institutional support. The model is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Integrative Model of Communicative Competence Formation

Component	Evidence from Data	Function in Competence Formation
Ethical and Spiritual Orientation	Calm speech, respectful posture, expressions of amanah and sincerity	Provides internal moral grounding for communication choices
Dialogic Practice	Active discussion, clarifying questions, peer support	Develops clarity of thought and sensitivity toward others perspectives
Digital Engagement	Video tasks, image selection, digital presentations	Shapes message design and strengthens awareness of audience and ethics
Institutional Structure	Curriculum guidelines, rubrics, reflective tasks	Sets expectations and supports consistent development of communication skills

Together, these themes present communicative competence as a multidimensional construct shaped by internal values, social interaction, digital practice, and institutional guidance. The findings show that competence does not emerge from a single source but from the convergence of personal orientation, learning processes, and the wider educational environment.

Based on these four thematic domains, this study proposes the Islamic Educommunication Competence Model, which synthesises ethical, spiritual grounding, dialogic interaction, digital communication practices, and institutional influences into an integrative framework. Figure 1 visualises how these components interact to shape communicative competence among prospective Islamic early childhood educators.
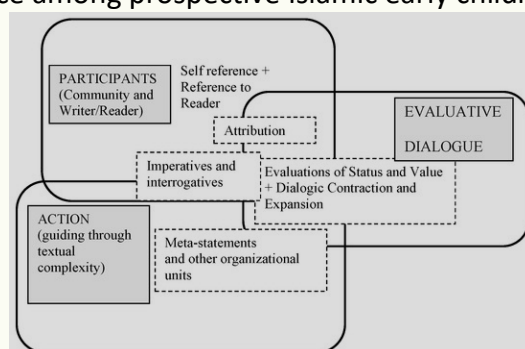

Figure 1. Islamic Educommunication Competence Model

Figure 1. The Islamic Educommunication Competence Model conceptualises communicative competence as a multidimensional construct shaped by four interdependent domains: ethical spiritual grounding, dialogic engagement, digital communication practice, and institutional structure. The model visualises communicative competence as an ethical–dialogic–digital process embedded within Islamic pedagogical values and reinforced by institutional environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that communicative competence among prospective Islamic early childhood educators develops through four interconnected dimensions, namely ethical and spiritual grounding, dialogic engagement, digital practice, and institutional structure. These findings show that competence arises not from a single skill but through an ongoing developmental process shaped by intention, interaction, and environment. This section discusses the meaning of these results and their contribution to broader scholarly conversations.

An unexpected aspect of the findings is the central role of ethical and spiritual grounding in communication. Previous studies in global teacher education contexts often emphasised linguistic clarity, instructional efficiency, or classroom management as the primary components of communicative competence, while ethics was treated as supplementary rather than foundational (Hyland 2018 and Mercer 2020). In contrast, this study shows that participants consistently described communication as an act tied to moral responsibility, sincerity, and awareness of divine presence. This result aligns with arguments in value based communication theory which suggest that intention and moral consciousness shape the quality of interaction (Belasen, 2008; Habermas, 1990; Trayner, 2017; Weaver, 2006).The novelty of this finding lies in the consistency with which ethical sensibilities were embodied in observable behaviour, something that earlier research seldom documented explicitly.

The findings also carry significance for understanding the social order of communication in Islamic teacher education. The consistent display of respectful speech, attentive listening, and controlled emotional expression suggests that ethical norms function as a stabilising force in classroom communication. This supports theories that view moral values as tools for maintaining order within learning environments (Hiver et al. 2021). Moreover, dialogic engagement in this study was not merely a pedagogical technique but a sign of a broader communication culture that privileges mutual respect, shared meaning, and collaborative inquiry. These patterns correspond to earlier findings that dialogic interaction promotes social cohesion in educational settings (Wegerif 2019). Thus, the results can be read as evidence of a communication order shaped by Islamic ethical frameworks.

The findings also serve as an early indicator of shifts that may occur in the future. The increasing use of digital tools for creating learning materials, giving presentations, and communicating ideas suggests that digital communication may soon become a core professional requirement for teachers. This reinforces international calls for stronger digital

literacy in teacher preparation programs (OECD 2022 and UNESCO 2023). The fact that participants already engage in ethical decision making when selecting images, sounds, and messages indicates that digital ethics will become an important area for institutional development. Without intentional training, educators may face communication challenges in digital spaces, especially when handling sensitive religious or cultural content.

The reasons for these findings can be traced to broader historical and cultural forces. Islamic education in Indonesia has long prioritised character formation as part of teacher preparation, which explains why ethical and spiritual orientation appears prominently in communication practices (Azra 2021). The emphasis on dialogic engagement reflects social traditions that value communal discussion and respectful exchange. The rapid integration of technology into daily life explains the growth of digital communication practices among students (Belasen, 2008; Coldwell-Neilson et al., 2019; Thompson, 2013; Tila & Cera, 2021). Meanwhile, the influence of institutional structure aligns with curriculum reforms that encourage holistic competence formation. Together, these contextual elements clarify why communicative competence in this setting emerges as an ethical, relational, and technological phenomenon.

Several lessons can be drawn from these findings. Communication training in Islamic teacher education should not be limited to technique or language use but should include structured opportunities for ethical reflection, dialogic interaction, and digital communication practice. This supports recommendations from global studies calling for integrated competence frameworks in teacher preparation (Darling Hammond 2021). Institutions may strengthen their programs by encouraging reflective journals, collaborative projects, and digital portfolios that help students develop communication as a holistic competence. The study shows that effective communication grows when systems support both inner character formation and outward skill development.

This study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single institution, which may limit the transferability of the findings. The qualitative approach provided depth but did not allow for broad measurement of competence. Future research should consider combining qualitative analysis with survey based or performance based assessments to capture patterns across larger populations. Further studies can also explore how ethical and digital dimensions of communication manifest in professional teaching contexts or in other regions of Islamic education. There is also potential for longitudinal research to examine how communicative competence evolves during early years of teaching practice.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that communicative competence among prospective Early Childhood Islamic Education teachers is a multidimensional construct shaped by the interaction of Islamic moral ethics, dialogical pedagogy, critical digital literacy, and culturally rooted communication norms. These findings confirm that communication within Islamic teacher education is neither merely a linguistic ability nor a technical skill; rather, it is an ethical, relational, and digitally mediated practice that reflects the broader spiritual and

sociocultural foundations of Islamic education. Through their daily interactions, reflective practices, and emerging digital engagements, PIAUD students develop communicative identities grounded in sincerity, compassion, and respectful dialogue while also navigating the demands of contemporary communication environments.

The study contributes theoretically by proposing a Critical–Integrative Model of Islamic Educommunication, which synthesizes Islamic pedagogical values with contemporary communication theory and intercultural pragmatics. This model clarifies how spiritual ethics, dialogic engagement, and digital competence operate together to form a holistic communicative framework suited for Islamic early childhood education. Practically, the findings highlight the need for teacher education programs to embed communication training that integrates Qur'anic ethics, dialogical methods, reflective practice, and critical digital literacy. Such an approach strengthens not only verbal and nonverbal skills but also educators' moral agency, cultural competence, and capacity for sustainable communication.

The results also carry broader implications for Islamic education in Indonesia. By revealing the importance of local wisdom such as tut wuri handayani, musyawarah, and empathy-based communication, the study underscores the need for pedagogical models that honor cultural heritage while preparing teachers for globalized and technology-rich environments. Embedding ethical communication within teacher training programs can foster more inclusive, humanizing, and spiritually grounded learning spaces for young children.

This study is limited by its qualitative scope and institutional focus, which may restrict generalizability. Future research could employ mixed-methods approaches, cross-institutional comparisons, or longitudinal studies to examine how communicative competence develops over time and how the integrative model applies in diverse Islamic education contexts. Further exploration of how digital ethics, artificial intelligence, and intercultural dialogue shape communicative identities among Islamic educators would also strengthen the field.

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