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Examining Content Knowledge Readiness among Pre-Service Islamic Education Teachers: Preliminary Findings

Mengkaji Persediaan Pengetahuan Kandungan dalam Kalangan Guru Pendidikan Islam Pra-Perkhidmatan: Dapatan Awal

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Article Information	ABSTRACT
<i>Received:</i> 02.04.2026	This preliminary study examined the level of Islamic education content-knowledge readiness among pre-service Islamic education teachers at the Kulliyah of Education (KOED), International Islamic University Malaysia. Sixteen respondents completed a structured questionnaire assessing 13 dimensions of content knowledge, encompassing key Islamic disciplines and Arabic language proficiency. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean scores and standard deviations, to determine respondents' perceived levels of readiness. The findings revealed an overall high level of content knowledge, with mean scores ranging from 3.38 to 4.31. The respondents reported the greatest confidence in Akhlaq (Islamic ethics) and in applying Islamic values in educational contexts. However, comparatively moderate levels of confidence were identified in more advanced disciplines, including Aqidah, Usul al-Fiqh, Sirah Nabawiyah, and Maqasid al-Shariah. Arabic language proficiency, particularly speaking and writing skills emerged as relatively weaker areas. These findings underscore the importance of strengthening teacher education programmes by balancing foundational Islamic content mastery with advanced disciplinary reasoning and communicative Arabic-language competence. Such enhancement is essential to ensure that future Islamic education teachers are adequately prepared to deliver authentic, meaningful, and effective instruction.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching effectiveness is strongly influenced by teachers' mastery of content knowledge and their ability to apply appropriate pedagogical strategies. According to Shulman's concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), effective teaching occurs when teachers are able to integrate subject matter knowledge with suitable instructional methods. Similarly, the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework emphasises the interconnectedness of content, pedagogy, and technology in contemporary classrooms. Teachers who possess strong content knowledge are more confident and accurate in delivering lessons, while effective pedagogical skills enable them to present concepts in ways that are meaningful to learners. Teachers may demonstrate strong pedagogical strategies yet lack deep content knowledge, which can lead to less effective teaching practices (Rinla et al., 2025). For instance, although some mathematics teachers exhibit satisfactory levels of TPACK, they still face difficulties in aligning their instructional practices with prepared modules, reflecting a gap in content mastery (Djam'an

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et al., 2025). This imbalance between pedagogical skills and subject matter expertise weakens the integration of Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK), potentially limiting students' understanding and ultimately affecting the overall quality of teaching and learning.

The quality of education is fundamentally shaped by the knowledge and competence of those who deliver it. Among the various dimensions of teacher competence, content knowledge stands as a cornerstone a prerequisite that determines how effectively a teacher can facilitate meaningful learning in the classroom. This is especially significant in the context of Islamic Education, a discipline that encompasses not only theological and jurisprudential foundations but also ethical, spiritual, and pedagogical dimensions that demand a deep and nuanced understanding from its practitioners.

Pre-service teachers who are undergoing initial teacher education programmes represent the future of any nation's educational system. Ensuring that they are adequately equipped with robust content knowledge before entering the classroom is therefore a matter of both academic and societal importance. However, concerns have been raised across various educational contexts regarding gaps in subject matter mastery among teacher candidates, raising questions about the effectiveness of existing teacher preparation programmes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Content knowledge represents one of the most essential foundations of effective teaching. For pre-service teachers in Islamic education, mastery of subject matter extends beyond a purely pedagogical requirement, as it is closely linked to the spiritual, moral, and intellectual development of students. Preparing Islamic education teachers, therefore, requires engagement with a broad range of disciplines, including Quranic sciences, Hadith, Aqidah, Fiqh, Sirah Nabawiyah, Akhlaq, Usul Fiqh, and Maqasid Shariah. Alongside these core Islamic subjects, competence in the Arabic language is a particularly in listening, reading, speaking, and writing is crucial to enable teachers to engage authentically with primary Islamic texts.

Recent research has increasingly highlighted the readiness and competency of pre-service Islamic education teachers, particularly in the post-pandemic context where gaps in knowledge acquisition and professional preparation have become more apparent (Suhid et al., 2021; Abdullah & Munawir, 2025). Although content knowledge is widely recognised as a central component of teacher education, empirical studies that systematically examine pre-service teachers' self-perceived content knowledge across multiple Islamic disciplinary domains simultaneously remain relatively scarce. The review is organised into two main thematic areas: (1) Islamic disciplinary content knowledge and (2) Arabic language competency.

2.1. Content Knowledge in Islamic Education

The conceptual foundation of teacher knowledge can be traced to Shulman (1987) seminal distinction between subject matter content knowledge (CK) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). This framework has continued to inform contemporary research in Islamic teacher education. In the Malaysian context, Mohd Nawi et al. (2025) applied the PCK framework to examine the teaching of *Usul al-Fiqh* among Islamic education teachers, demonstrating that strong CK remains a fundamental element of effective Islamic instruction. Their findings also revealed persistent challenges in translating deep disciplinary knowledge into pedagogically meaningful classroom practices, highlighting the need to assess the level of content knowledge among pre-service teachers.

Recent reforms in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curricula in Malaysia have further underscored the importance of adequate teacher content preparation. Hashim et al. (2022) noted that many IRE teachers remain heavily reliant on conventional teaching approaches, particularly textbook-based instruction and the use of whiteboards. As a result, teachers often face difficulties in designing Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) questions and implementing School-Based Assessment (SBA) effectively, leading to a predominance of teacher-centred instructional practices. Additional challenges include an overloaded syllabus and frequently changing educational policies, both of which complicate effective teaching and learning processes. In response to these concerns, the Standard Guru Malaysia 2.0 introduced by the

Ministry of Education Malaysia in 2023 formally recognises professional competence and content mastery as equally important pillars of teacher preparation. This policy development further highlights the significance of evaluating the content knowledge of pre-service teachers.

Ball et al. (2008) typology of mathematical knowledge for teaching, encompassing common content knowledge, specialised content knowledge, and horizon content knowledge, has been applied to a range of educational disciplines, including Islamic studies. The concept of horizon content knowledge, which refers to an awareness of how a discipline develops across levels of learning, is particularly pertinent to Islamic education, where subjects such as Usul Fiqh and Maqasid Shariah build upon foundational knowledge in Fiqh, Hadith, and Quranic interpretation. Sapiudin et al. (2025), in designing a digitally integrated critical-contextual learning model for Usul al-Fiqh, explicitly acknowledged this hierarchical structure, emphasizing that pre-service teachers must possess strong foundational CK before facilitating higher-order jurisprudential reasoning for students.

2.2. Areas of Islamic Education

2.2.1. *Quran*

Quranic content knowledge constitutes a central component of Islamic teacher preparation. Competency in Quranic sciences extends beyond basic recitation skills (Tajwid) to include interpretive understanding, such as engagement with Tafsir and the ability to analyse Quranic verses within their broader contexts. Hakim et al. (2022), in a study examining learning strategies for reading and writing the Quran among pre-service teachers at a Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, reported a concerning finding: several Islamic education students enrolled in teacher education programmes were unable to read the Quran accurately. This result highlights a critical baseline competency gap that teacher preparation programmes must address to ensure adequate mastery of foundational Quranic knowledge.

Similarly, Abd Mubi et al. (2024), in their examination of teacher competencies within the Special Class on Quranic Recitation and Memorisation Skills (KKQ), identified content knowledge as one of six key teacher competency domains, alongside pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, and knowledge of students' backgrounds. Their findings further indicate that content knowledge in Quranic sciences is not evenly distributed among practising and pre-service teachers. Moreover, the study revealed that proficiency in Quranic recitation does not necessarily correspond with deeper analytical understanding of Quranic content. This distinction is particularly relevant to the present study, which incorporates self-assessment items designed to evaluate both procedural and conceptual aspects of Quranic knowledge among pre-service teachers.

2.2.2. *Hadith*

The sciences of Hadith pose distinctive challenges for pre-service Islamic education teachers. Mastery of this discipline requires not only familiarity with widely known prophetic traditions but also competence in the methodological principles of Hadith authentication. This includes the ability to evaluate chains of transmission (Isnad) and understand the classification of narrators (Rijal al-hadith). Recent scholarship has emphasised that teachers who lack adequate grounding in Hadith methodology may inadvertently transmit misattributed or contextually misunderstood traditions to students, potentially affecting students' religious understanding and formation (Kusainun, 2024).

The challenge of developing strong Hadith knowledge in teacher preparation is also closely linked to broader issues concerning engagement with primary Islamic sources. Ritonga et al. (2023), in discussing the future of Arabic language learning in relation to the study of Islamic texts, observed that insufficient Arabic proficiency limits students' ability to access and interpret Hadith in its original linguistic context. This highlights the strong interrelationship between Arabic language competency and Islamic disciplinary content knowledge. Recognising this interdependence, the present study examines both dimensions concurrently in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of pre-service teachers' content knowledge readiness.

2.2.3. *Aqidah*

Aqidah holds a central and foundational role in Islamic education, serving as the theological framework upon which other Islamic disciplines are built. In the contemporary context, teachers are required not only to possess a solid understanding of the principles of Islamic creed but also the ability to explain and defend these theological concepts when addressing modern intellectual challenges such as secularism, atheism, and religious pluralism. One of the major challenges faced by Islamic education teachers today is the need to contextualise the teaching of '*Aqidah* within the worldview of younger generations. This requires a depth of theological understanding that goes beyond a basic familiarity with the pillars of faith.

At the same time, the younger generation is increasingly exposed to vast amounts of information through digital platforms, which may make them susceptible to deviant beliefs despite receiving formal religious education (Sulaiman et al., 2022). Consequently, teachers are expected not only to transmit religious knowledge but also to cultivate students' critical thinking and moral reasoning skills so that they can navigate contemporary intellectual and ethical challenges effectively (Indriani et al., 2024). Furthermore, globalization introduces diverse cultural perspectives and ideologies that may influence students' attitudes and perspectives, sometimes leading to tensions with Islamic values. The rapid expansion of digital technology also enables students to access various forms of online content, including those that may negatively affect their moral development (Muhammad Nur Effendi et al., 2025).

2.2.4. *Fiqh*

Fiqh, as a major branch of Islamic knowledge, is highly significant for teachers because of its direct connection to students' daily practices and experiences. Effective *Fiqh* instruction does not merely focus on transmitting knowledge of Islamic rulings but also contributes to the development of students' moral awareness and ethical values. In this regard, the use of contextual learning approaches is important in helping students understand and apply *Fiqh* principles in real-life situations. Teachers often employ strategies such as practical exercises, classroom discussions, and demonstrations to relate *Fiqh* concepts to students' everyday experiences (Azhar et al., 2025).

Furthermore, contextual approaches enable students to connect *Fiqh* teachings with their social interactions, thereby increasing their engagement and comprehension of the subject (Nurhajidah & Hidayatullah, 2025). However, teachers frequently encounter several challenges in implementing effective *Fiqh* instruction, including limited teaching resources, time constraints, and differences in students' learning abilities (Azhar et al., 2025). In addition, cultural diversity and varying interpretations of *Fiqh* may further complicate its application in everyday contexts (Muchlisin Limbong et al., 2025). Research also indicates that students who examine *Fiqh* in relation to their own life experiences tend to develop a deeper understanding of the concept of Islamic moderation (Suhartini et al., 2023).

While the practical application of *Fiqh* remains essential, some scholars argue that strict adherence to traditional interpretations may limit its flexibility in addressing contemporary issues, which could distance younger generations from engaging meaningfully with Islamic teachings. This situation may be further intensified by conservative perspectives among certain Islamic scholars who maintain a clear separation between traditional religious instruction and contemporary educational innovations (Ismail & Stapa, 2011, as cited in Mohd Zuraini et al., 2025).

2.2.5. *Sirah Nabawiyah*

Sirah Nabawiyah offers the historical and biographical context that brings the Qur'anic revelation to life and illustrates the formation of the early Muslim community. In this regard, content knowledge in *Sirah* extends beyond merely knowing the major events of the Prophet's life; it also involves the ability to derive moral, legal, and spiritual lessons that remain relevant to contemporary Muslim life. Kusainun (2024), in a study examining Islamic education methods derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, emphasised that the life and teachings of the Prophet serve as a pedagogical model in themselves. Therefore, teachers' depth of knowledge in *Sirah* is closely related to their ability to exemplify prophetic character and wisdom within educational settings.

In the context of Islamic education in the digital era, studies have highlighted the growing use of digital narrative content to support the teaching of Sirah. For instance, animated materials featuring the Prophet and his companions have been shown to enhance student engagement with Sirah topics (Santosa & Jazuli, 2022; Muharrani et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of such digital approaches largely depends on teachers' own mastery of Sirah knowledge. Adequate content knowledge enables teachers to contextualise the historical narratives, critically evaluate digital materials, and enrich them with deeper explanations that support meaningful learning.

2.2.6. *Akhlaq*

Akhlaq, the discipline concerned with Islamic ethics and character development, holds a unique place in Islamic teacher education as it represents both a body of knowledge and a moral responsibility. Teachers of Akhlaq are expected not only to understand the theoretical foundations of Islamic moral philosophy but also to embody the ethical values they teach in their daily conduct. Bunaya and Abdul Jalil (2024), drawing on the ethical perspectives of al-Ghazali and Ibn Miskawayh, argue that the process of character formation in Islamic education requires teachers to possess a comprehensive understanding of both the conceptual principles of Islamic ethics and their practical application in everyday life.

Virtues such as patience, respect, kindness, and mutual assistance illustrate the dual expectations placed upon Islamic education teachers. They are required to demonstrate strong content knowledge of Akhlaq as an academic discipline while simultaneously reflecting these ethical principles in their personal behaviour and professional practice. This dual role highlights the importance of integrating moral understanding with lived example in the teaching of Islamic education.

2.2.7. *Usul Fiqh*

Usul al-Fiqh is widely regarded as one of the most intellectually demanding components within the Islamic education curriculum for pre-service teachers. Sapiudin et al. (2025), in developing a digitally integrated critical-contextual learning model for Usul al-Fiqh among future Islamic education teachers, acknowledged the complexity of the discipline and highlighted the need for innovative pedagogical strategies to improve student engagement and comprehension.

Similarly, Mohd Nawi et al. (2025), in their study on pedagogical content knowledge of Usul al-Fiqh in the Malaysian Islamic education context, found that strong content knowledge in this field is fundamental for effective teaching. However, their findings also indicate that many teachers lack confidence in mastering the more advanced methodological aspects of the discipline. Majid (2024) further emphasised that Usul al-Fiqh occupies a distinctive epistemological role in Islamic scholarship, functioning as a bridge between the revealed sources and the process of legal reasoning. Consequently, a solid foundation in Usul al-Fiqh is particularly important, as it significantly influences the depth and quality of Islamic education instruction.

2.2.8. *Maqasid Shariah*

Maqasid al-Shariah, which refers to the higher objectives and underlying purposes of Islamic law, has received increasing scholarly attention in recent years as an integrative framework for contemporary Islamic education and governance. Mohammed (2024) highlighted that Malaysia has emerged as a significant centre for Maqasid scholarship, with growing research focusing on both its theoretical foundations and practical applications in areas such as education, finance, ethics, and legal studies. This increasing academic interest has consequently raised expectations for Islamic education teachers to possess at least a foundational understanding of Maqasid al-Shariah.

Despite its expanding relevance, the integration of Maqasid al-Shariah into pre-service teacher education remains relatively limited. Research examining Islamic educational management (Miftahussurur et al., 2025) noted that Maqasid al-Shariah is often referenced as a general ethical ideal rather than being systematically applied as an analytical framework within educational practice. For pre-service teachers, this situation means that Maqasid al-Shariah is sometimes encountered more as a conceptual slogan than as a structured

academic discipline. As a result, empirical studies frequently report low levels of familiarity with its methodological dimensions among Islamic education students.

2.2.9. Arabic Language

Arabic language proficiency is closely linked to the quality of Islamic content knowledge, as the primary sources of Islam the Qur'an and the Sunnah are preserved in classical Arabic. In this study, Arabic proficiency is examined through four key skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing, which are widely discussed in research on Arabic education in Islamic teacher preparation.

Previous studies indicate that reading comprehension is generally stronger among Malaysian Islamic education students than listening skills. Rahman et al. (2019), in their study of Arabic language teachers in Sekolah Agama Bantuan Kerajaan (SABK), found that the traditional grammar-translation approach in Arabic instruction has historically emphasised reading more than communicative and listening abilities. This imbalance can limit teachers' access to oral scholarly traditions that remain important in Islamic learning contexts. In addition, research shows that students tend to perform better in modern standard Arabic reading than in classical Arabic texts with complex syntactic structures (Ilmiani et al., 2020; Bahrudin et al., 2021), which may restrict their ability to engage directly with primary Qur'anic and jurisprudential sources.

Oral Arabic proficiency is often identified as the weakest skill among pre-service Islamic education teachers. Studies in Indonesia found that many teacher candidates struggle with spoken Arabic, making it difficult for them to model authentic language use or create immersive learning environments (Ruhendi & Kosim, 2022; Nurbayan et al., 2023). This issue is particularly relevant in Malaysia, where Arabic is often taught in Malay-medium schools with limited opportunities for oral practice. Similarly, Arabic writing proficiency remains challenging because it requires a high level of grammatical accuracy and vocabulary mastery (Sanusi et al., 2024). Consistent with broader second language acquisition research, productive skills such as speaking and writing typically develop more slowly than receptive skills like reading and listening (Arif et al., 2023).

Summary

Despite the growing body of research on Islamic teacher education, several limitations remain evident in the existing literature. First, many studies examine individual Islamic disciplines in isolation rather than analysing the integrated nature of Islamic content knowledge. Islamic education is inherently interdisciplinary, where fields such as Qur'anic studies, Hadith, Fiqh, Aqidah, and Usul al-Fiqh are intellectually interconnected. However, much of the existing research tends to focus on single subjects or specific pedagogical practices, which limits a comprehensive understanding of how pre-service teachers develop a holistic grasp of Islamic knowledge.

Second, the literature frequently emphasises pedagogical strategies and classroom practices while providing limited empirical measurement of teachers' actual content knowledge levels. Although frameworks such as that proposed by Lee S. Shulman highlight the centrality of subject matter knowledge in teaching, many studies in Islamic education primarily investigate teaching methods, digital learning tools, or instructional innovations without systematically evaluating teachers' disciplinary mastery. As a result, the empirical evidence regarding the level of content knowledge among pre-service Islamic education teachers remains relatively limited.

Third, Arabic language proficiency is widely acknowledged as a key enabling factor for accessing primary Islamic sources, yet it is often examined separately from Islamic disciplinary knowledge. Since the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic scholarship are preserved in Arabic, limitations in Arabic language competency may restrict teachers' ability to engage deeply with original texts. This separation between language proficiency studies and Islamic disciplinary knowledge research may therefore overlook the interconnected nature of linguistic and religious scholarship in Islamic teacher education.

In summary, the literature highlights that strong content knowledge forms the foundation of effective Islamic education teaching. Islamic teachers are expected to possess a comprehensive understanding of multiple disciplines, including Qur'anic studies, Hadith, Aqidah, Fiqh, Sirah Nabawiyyah, Akhlaq, Usul al-Fiqh, and Maqasid al-Shariah, while also demonstrating sufficient Arabic language proficiency to engage with primary Islamic texts. Existing research also indicates that Islamic education teachers face several challenges, including difficulties in translating disciplinary knowledge into effective classroom practice, reliance on traditional teaching approaches, and limitations in Arabic language skills.

However, the review also reveals several important gaps. Many studies focus on individual subject areas rather than examining Islamic disciplinary knowledge holistically. In addition, empirical investigations that systematically assess pre-service teachers' content knowledge across multiple Islamic domains remain limited. Furthermore, the relationship between Arabic language competency and Islamic content knowledge has not been sufficiently explored in an integrated manner.

Therefore, there is a need for further empirical research that evaluates the level of content knowledge among pre-service Islamic education teachers across various Islamic disciplines while also considering their Arabic language competency. Such investigation is important in determining whether current teacher preparation programmes adequately equip future Islamic education teachers with the knowledge required to meet contemporary educational expectations and professional standards.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative research approach using a survey design to examine the content knowledge of pre-service Islamic education teachers at the Kulliyah of Education (KOED). As a preliminary study, the sample consisted of 16 final-year pre-service teachers from KOED, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), who were selected through random sampling. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The instrument was adapted from Azizan (2015) and comprised two main dimensions: (1) knowledge of Islamic texts and principles, and (2) proficiency in the Arabic language.

The questionnaire used in this study was reviewed by several experts in Islamic education to ensure its content validity and suitability for assessing the content knowledge of pre-service Islamic education teachers. The experts evaluated the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questionnaire items in relation to the constructs being measured.

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha. The analysis produced a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.947, indicating a very high level of internal consistency among the questionnaire items. According to Hair et al. (2019), a Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 is considered acceptable, while values above 0.90 indicate excellent reliability. Therefore, the reliability coefficient obtained in this study demonstrates that the instrument is highly reliable for measuring the content knowledge of pre-service Islamic education teachers in this preliminary study.

Table 1: Reliability of Items

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Content Knowledge Readiness	13	0.94

4. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the quantitative analysis of the data collected through the Likert-scale questionnaire. The results provide insights into the levels of content knowledge readiness among pre-service Islamic education teachers at KOED.

Table 2: Content Knowledge Readiness

Items No.	Statements	SD % (N)	D% (N)	N% (N)	A% (N)	SA% (N)	Means	Std. Deviation
1.	I have sufficient knowledge about the fields of the Quran.	-	6.3 (1)	18.8 (3)	25.0 (4)	80.0 (8)	4.19	.981
2.	I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Hadith.	-	6.3 (1)	37.5 (6)	37.5 (6)	18.8 (3)	3.69	.873
3.	I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Aqidah.	-	-	37.5 (6)	31.3 (5)	31.3 (5)	3.94	.854
4.	I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Fiqh.	-	-	31.3 (5)	37.5 (6)	31.3 (5)	4.00	.816
5.	I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Sirah Nabawiyah.	-	-	37.5 (6)	43.8 (7)	18.8 (3)	3.81	.750
6.	I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Akhlaq.	-	-	12.5 (2)	43.8 (7)	43.8 (7)	4.31	.704
7.	I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Usul Fiqh.	-	6.3 (1)	18.8 (3)	62.5 (10)	12.5 (2)	3.81	.750
8.	I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Maqasid Shariah.	-	-	31.3 (5)	50.0 (8)	18.8 (3)	3.88	.719
9.	I can explain Islamic ethical values and their application in daily life.	-	-	6.3 (1)	56.3 (9)	37.5 (6)	4.31	.602
10.	I can understand spoken Arabic.	-	6.3 (1)	18.8 (3)	68.8 (11)	6.3 (1)	3.75	.683
11.	I can understand Arabic texts.	-	6.3 (1)	31.3 (5)	56.3 (9)	6.3 (1)	3.63	.719
12.	I can communicate in Arabic.	-	6.3 (1)	56.3 (9)	31.3 (5)	6.3 (1)	3.38	.719
13.	I can write in Arabic.	-	-	43.8 (7)	50.0 (8)	6.3 (1)	3.63	.619

Based on the findings, the items were ranked from the highest to the lowest as follows:

Item 9, “I can explain Islamic ethical values and their application in daily life” recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.31$, $SD = .602$), followed by Item 6, “I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Akhlaq” ($M = 4.31$, $SD = .704$). The third highest was Item 1, “I have sufficient knowledge about the fields of the Quran” ($M = 4.19$, $SD = .981$). This was followed by Item 4, “I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Fiqh” ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .816$), and Item 3, “I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Aqidah” ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .854$). Next, Item 8, “I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Maqasid Shariah” ranked sixth ($M = 3.88$, $SD = .719$). Items 5 and 7 shared the same mean score, namely Item 5, “I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Sirah Nabawiyah” and Item 7, “I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Usul Fiqh” ($M = 3.81$, $SD = .750$). This was followed by Item 10, “I can understand spoken Arabic” ($M = 3.75$, $SD = .683$), and Item 2, “I have sufficient knowledge about the field of Hadith” ($M = 3.69$, $SD = .873$). Subsequently, Item 11, “I can understand Arabic texts” and Item 13, “I can write in Arabic” recorded the same mean score ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .719$; $M = 3.63$, $SD = .619$ respectively). Finally, the lowest mean score was recorded by Item 12, “I can communicate in Arabic” ($M = 3.38$, $SD = .719$).

5. DISCUSSION

From the findings, it showed the pre-service Islamic education teachers had high level of content knowledge readiness. The findings indicate that the highest-ranked items were Item 9 (ability to explain Islamic ethical values and their application in daily life) and Item 6 (knowledge of Akhlaq), both recording the highest

mean score ($M = 4.31$). This result suggests that pre-service Islamic education teachers perceive themselves as relatively confident in the domain of Islamic ethics. Such a finding is consistent with the literature that highlights Akhlaq as a central component of Islamic teacher identity, where teachers are expected not only to understand ethical principles but also to embody them in their professional conduct (Bunaya & Abdul Jalil, 2024). However, the strong self-perception in this area should also be interpreted cautiously. Ethical understanding in Islamic education involves both theoretical knowledge and lived practice, and self-assessment may not necessarily reflect the depth of teachers' ability to translate ethical principles into consistent classroom practice.

The relatively high ranking of Quran knowledge (Item 1) and Fiqh knowledge (Item 4) further indicates that respondents feel confident in foundational Islamic disciplines. Quranic sciences and fiqh are core components of Islamic education curricula and are frequently encountered in formal religious instruction, which may contribute to this perceived competence. Nevertheless, previous research suggests that mastery of Quranic recitation does not always correspond with deeper interpretive understanding (Abd Mubi et al., 2024), while fiqh teaching often focuses on practical rulings rather than critical engagement with legal reasoning (Azhar et al., 2025). This raises an important consideration that strong self-perceived knowledge in these areas may reflect familiarity with commonly taught topics rather than comprehensive disciplinary mastery.

Moderate scores were observed in disciplines such as Aqidah (Item 3), Maqasid Shariah (Item 8), Sirah Nabawiyah (Item 5), and Usul Fiqh (Item 7). These findings are consistent with existing literature that describes these fields as conceptually demanding and often less emphasised in teacher preparation programmes. Aqidah teaching, for instance, increasingly requires teachers to address contemporary ideological challenges such as secularism and digital misinformation, which demand deeper theological and analytical competence (Indriani et al., 2024; Sulaiman et al., 2022). Similarly, Usul al-Fiqh and Maqasid al-Shariah represent higher-level conceptual frameworks that require strong foundational knowledge in other Islamic disciplines (Sapiudin et al., 2025; Mohammed, 2024). The moderate scores in these areas may therefore reflect the hierarchical structure of Islamic knowledge, where advanced methodological disciplines are often more challenging for pre-service teachers to master.

The lowest-ranked items were primarily associated with Arabic language proficiency, particularly speaking (Item 12), writing (Item 13), and reading comprehension (Item 11). This pattern aligns with previous studies indicating that Arabic language skills, especially productive skills such as speaking and writing, remain a persistent challenge among pre-service Islamic education teachers (Ruhendi & Kosim, 2022; Nurbayan et al., 2023; Sanusi et al., 2024). In many Malaysian educational settings, Arabic instruction continues to rely heavily on grammar-translation approaches that emphasise reading over communicative competence (Rahman et al., 2019). Consequently, although students may develop basic comprehension of written texts, their ability to actively communicate in Arabic remains limited. From a critical perspective, this gap has significant implications for Islamic teacher preparation, as limited Arabic proficiency may restrict teachers' ability to engage directly with primary Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and Hadith in their original linguistic context (Ritonga et al., 2023).

Overall, the findings suggest that pre-service Islamic education teachers demonstrate stronger confidence in ethical and foundational Islamic subjects, while showing comparatively lower confidence in advanced methodological disciplines and Arabic language skills. This pattern highlights an important challenge in Islamic teacher education: while foundational religious knowledge appears to be relatively well established, deeper disciplinary reasoning and linguistic competence may require further strengthening to ensure that future teachers can engage critically with Islamic sources and effectively transmit them in contemporary educational contexts.

Implications for Islamic Education Teachers

The findings of this preliminary study have several important implications for Islamic teacher preparation programmes. First, the strong confidence in Akhlaq and ethical knowledge suggests that current curricula effectively emphasize moral and character education; however, teacher educators should ensure that these competencies translate into practical pedagogical applications, enabling students to model and reinforce

ethical principles in real classroom contexts. Second, the moderate scores in Aqidah, Usul Fiqh, Sirah Nabawiyah, and Maqasid Shariah indicate that pre-service teachers may benefit from more structured exposure to higher-order Islamic disciplinary reasoning, including opportunities for critical engagement and analytical exercises that integrate these subjects into contemporary challenges. Third, the relatively low Arabic language proficiency, particularly in speaking and writing, underscores the need to strengthen communicative and productive Arabic skills through immersive, interactive, and contextually relevant language activities. Integrating these elements into teacher education not only supports better access to primary Islamic sources but also equips future teachers with the linguistic tools necessary for authentic, high-quality instruction. Collectively, these findings highlight the importance of a balanced approach in Islamic teacher education one that develops both foundational knowledge and advanced reasoning skills while concurrently cultivating linguistic competence to prepare teachers for the complexities of modern Islamic education.

6. CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings suggest that pre-service Islamic education teachers demonstrate stronger confidence in ethical and foundational Islamic subjects, while exhibiting lower confidence in advanced methodological disciplines and Arabic language skills. From a critical perspective, this indicates a potential imbalance in teacher preparation programmes, where foundational knowledge may be prioritized over higher-order reasoning and language proficiency, which are essential for effective, authentic, and contextually relevant Islamic instruction.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

This preliminary study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the small sample size of only 16 participants limits the generalizability of the results to all pre-service Islamic education teachers in Malaysia. Second, the study relied on self-reported measures, which may be influenced by overestimation or social desirability bias; incorporating observational or performance-based assessments could provide more objective insights into teachers' actual content knowledge and pedagogical skills. Third, the cross-sectional design captures respondents' perceptions at a single point in time, preventing an examination of how content knowledge and Arabic language proficiency develop over the course of teacher preparation.

For future studies, research could address these limitations by involving a larger and more diverse sample to enhance generalizability. A mixed-methods approach, integrating observational assessments, classroom simulations, and interviews, could provide a richer and more nuanced understanding of pre-service teachers' competencies. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to track the developmental trajectories of content knowledge, Arabic proficiency, and ethical competence throughout teacher training. Additionally, future research could explore the effectiveness of integrated curriculum interventions, such as combining advanced Islamic disciplinary modules with immersive Arabic language experiences, to strengthen both subject mastery and teaching readiness.

Research and Publication Ethics Statement

The authors affirm that this study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards in research and publication. All procedures involving participants were carried out with integrity, ensuring voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality of responses. The authors declare that this manuscript is original, has not been published elsewhere, and is not under consideration for publication in any other journal. Proper acknowledgment of all sources has been made, and any potential conflicts of interest have been disclosed.

Contribution Rates of Authors to the Article

All authors have made substantial contributions to this study. These contributions include the conceptualisation and design of the research, data collection and analysis, as well as the writing and revision

of the manuscript. All authors have reviewed and approved the final version of the article and agree to be accountable for the content of the work.

Statement of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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