

Effectiveness of Using the Merdeka Mengajar Platform in Improving the Pedagogical Competence of Teachers at Integrated Islamic Kindergarten

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Abstract---This research aims to analyze the effectiveness of using the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) in improving the pedagogical competence of teachers at the Integrated Islamic Kindergarten Muthmainnah. Pedagogical competence is a key skill for teachers, encompassing the ability to understand students, design, and implement learning processes. The research method used is qualitative, employing data collection techniques such as interviews, observation, and documentation. The findings indicate that the use of the Merdeka Mengajar platform provides access to relevant training materials, inspirational videos, and interactive features that assist teachers in developing creative and innovative teaching skills. The discussion in this study highlights how PMM, as a technology-based platform, can help teachers overcome limitations in lesson design and facilitate continuous professional development. PMM has proven effective as a medium for enhancing teachers' pedagogical competence, as it fulfills the need for self-directed training and quality learning resources that are accessible anytime and anywhere.

Keywords—*Merdeka Mengajar; Pedagogical Competence; Teacher; Kindergarten; Early Childhood Education*

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the Indonesian Ministry of Education Regulation No. 16 of 2007 on Academic Qualifications and Teacher Competencies, there are four core competencies that teachers must develop: pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies. The National Education Standards, Article 28, paragraph (3), item a, defines pedagogical competence as the ability to manage student learning, which includes understanding students, designing instruction, implementing learning, assessing learning outcomes, and fostering student development to actualize their potential (Nafila, 2024).

According to Somantri, as cited in (Yusuf et al., 2024), pedagogical competence is an essential skill that enables teachers to manage students effectively and understand their development comprehensively across moral, emotional, and

intellectual dimensions. Pedagogical competence encompasses the ability to analyze and enhance students' learning characteristics, innovate, and skillfully utilize information technology in the teaching process, as well as an understanding of concepts and theories during instruction.

Pedagogical competence among teachers includes a knowledge of educational foundations, an understanding of diverse student potentials, the ability to develop a curriculum based on students' needs and school conditions, proficiency in designing instructional strategies, and the capacity to integrate technology into learning processes (Yusuf et al., 2024).

A teacher's pedagogical competence significantly impacts students' learning outcomes, as it enables teachers to understand students' personalities and reflect this understanding in the learning process. Field cases frequently show that low student motivation to participate in class can be attributed to a teacher's limited ability to adapt teaching approaches to meet students' needs. Conversely, students who feel comfortable with their teachers are more likely to experience positive development, such as increased willingness to express opinions, fulfilled curiosity, improved problem-solving skills, and a greater sense of comfort in learning activities (Yusuf et al., 2024).

Research by Sofiana suggests that some teachers still struggle to implement age-appropriate teaching aligned with the curriculum. Teachers who lack a bachelor's degree and sufficient learning experience generally have limited knowledge of pedagogical competence. Further studies indicate that while the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in early childhood education has been relatively successful, schools still face challenges in selecting appropriate teaching methods and strategies, and teachers' technological skills remain limited (Sofiana & Juwita, 2024).

At the research site, the Integrated Islamic Kindergarten Muthmainnah, teachers already demonstrate good pedagogical competence; however, they still encounter challenges,

particularly in designing learning and play activities for early childhood students.

In response to the issues above, the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) has been introduced as a tool to facilitate teaching, student assessment, training for competency improvement, and a space for teachers to inspire one another (Ramdani et al., 2022). The Merdeka Mengajar Platform is designed for teachers and school principals as a reference for self-development and content creation in the teaching process. To access the features on the Merdeka Mengajar Platform, teachers or principals can log in using their Learning Account (belajar.id) (Yusuf et al., 2024).

The Merdeka Mengajar Platform provides equal opportunities for teachers across Indonesia to learn and enhance their competencies anytime and anywhere, as its learning features offer various self-training facilities, supplying high-quality training materials that enhance teachers' competencies (Setiary, 2023). Furthermore, the platform serves as a resource for teachers to improve their skills, particularly in implementing the Merdeka curriculum, and offers continuous professional development opportunities anytime and anywhere (Setiary, 2023).

Based on the background above, this study aims to explore the effectiveness of the Merdeka Mengajar platform at the Integrated Islamic Kindergarten Muthmainnah, to assess teachers' pedagogical competencies, and to investigate how PMM can enhance these competencies. The study employs a qualitative research method, using interviews, observation, and documentation for data collection.

This study is unique in that no prior research has investigated this topic at the selected site, Integrated Islamic Kindergarten Muthmainnah. This research is essential for evaluating the extent to which the Merdeka Mengajar platform can effectively improve teachers' pedagogical competencies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Merdeka Mengajar Platform has features that support teachers in competency development and the learning process. The features of the Merdeka Mengajar platform include: (1) Student Assessment: This contains diagnostic assessment questions for various phases and subjects, helping educators better understand students' learning processes and outcomes; (2) Teaching Resources: This includes various teaching materials to support teaching activities, such as instructional materials, learning modules, and project resources; (3) Self-Training: This includes concise training materials that allow educators to conduct independent training anytime and anywhere; (4) Community: This is a place for various learning communities across Indonesia that educators can use to share best practices, learning resources, and discussions with other educators; (5) Inspirational Videos: This contains inspirational videos designed by Kemendikbudristek and experts, serving as a reference to enhance educators' competencies; (6) Portfolio: This is used to document teachers' achievements, reflecting their performance, competencies, and

accomplishments as educators or principals (Hidayati et al., 2024).

The Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) is a digital application system that students, teachers, parents, and school stakeholders can use to access learning resources, complete assignments, and conduct online learning. According to Kemendikbudristek, the PMM indicators are: (1) User Activity, (2) Availability of training materials, (3) Level of teacher participation in self-training, (4) Availability of interactive features, and (5) Availability of assessments (Syatrian, 2023).

Pedagogical indicators that teachers must possess include: (1) Ability to master student characteristics, (2) Ability to implement educational and dialogical learning in schools, (3) Ability to conduct interactive communication with students, (4) Mastery of learning theory and principles, (5) Ability to develop student potential, (6) Ability to develop curriculum and syllabi, including designing and implementing educational and dialogical learning, (7) Ability to utilize learning technology, and (8) Ability to instill attitudes, character, and morals in students (Welana & Suryani, 2024).

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah in Bandung City from November 1 to November 4, 2024. TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah has five teachers, and a sample of two teachers was selected for interviews. The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach, with data collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. The interviews were conducted with teachers at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah who have experience using the merdeka belajar platform.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Profile of TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah

TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah is a private kindergarten located in Bojong Loa Kidul, Bandung City, West Java. The school was established on May 28, 2018, under the Ministry of Education and Culture. The current principal is Herlin Novianti, and the operator in charge is Siti Qoribah. The school employs a total of five teachers.

2. Use of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah

1) User Activity

This indicator measures how actively teachers use the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM). Based on interviews with Siti Qoribah, one of the teachers at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah, she reported accessing PMM approximately 2-3 times per week. Teachers regularly use the platform to obtain materials or guidelines that support classroom learning activities. This frequency shows that PMM is an important resource, even if it is not used daily.

The most frequently used features by teachers at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah are the self-paced training and teaching technique videos. These videos provide concrete

visual guidance on how to implement effective teaching methods in the classroom. Teachers find the practical examples and steps helpful, making it easier for them to adapt strategies to the needs and abilities of young children. Factors that limit teacher activity on the platform include time constraints and data availability.

According to (Prasetyaningsih, Nur; Muiz, 2024), a study conducted in an elementary school found that all teachers (100%) had installed the PMM application and utilized its various features.

2) Availability of Training Materials

This indicator measures the quantity of training materials available on PMM. Based on interviews with teachers at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah, PMM offers a wide array of training materials to support teachers' professional development. One example of the training provided on the platform is related to the Merdeka Curriculum. These materials meet the needs of teachers across different education levels and subjects, particularly for early childhood education teachers. One of the available training materials on the platform, the play-based learning approach, is particularly relevant for young learners. This approach is vital in early childhood education, where play is considered a primary method for children to learn and develop social, cognitive, and emotional skills. By using training materials focused on this method, teachers can implement interactive and enjoyable teaching techniques that encourage greater engagement from young students.

Teachers at TK IT Muthmainnah commented that the PMM training materials for kindergarten teachers are very comprehensive and useful in enhancing teaching skills. The PMM materials are provided in various formats, such as videos and modules, which are easily accessible for teachers. This variety enables teachers to choose the learning style that best suits their preferences and needs.

This is consistent with (Hidayati et al., 2024), who found that PMM provides teachers with the latest references and diverse teaching tools based on the Merdeka Curriculum, including lesson plans, teaching materials, project modules, student books, and assessments.

3) Teacher Participation Rate in Self-Paced Training

This indicator measures the extent to which teachers actively use PMM to enhance their competencies. All teachers at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah have used PMM and frequently access training materials on the platform, especially during their free time. PMM serves as a primary resource for teachers to learn new techniques, innovative teaching methods, and self-paced training materials that improve their pedagogical competence.

Several factors influence teacher activity levels in following PMM self-paced training. One key factor is the need for dedicated time outside of teaching hours. When participating in PMM training, some teachers complete the training until the final stage (implementation stage), while others only complete up to the post-test stage.

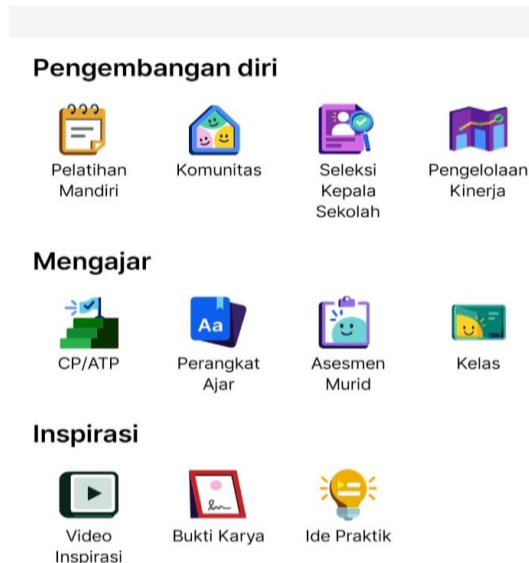
The use of merdeka mengajar platform can be affected by region, age, and educational level. Age is a particularly significant factor, with older teachers often facing challenges in adapting to new technology and teaching methods. Generally, teachers are motivated to complete PMM training because the materials are comprehensive and valuable in improving their teaching skills. However, there are instances when the presentation of materials, especially in video format, can lead to fatigue among some teachers, particularly if the videos are lengthy or lack interactivity.

This finding aligns with (Hidayati et al., 2024), who reported that 98.9% of teachers had used the PMM platform to support learning, while only about 0.1% had not used it.

4) Availability of Interactive Features

This indicator measures the extent of interactive features available on the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) to support teachers in their competency development.

Figure 1: Interface of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform



The Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) is divided into three main menus: self-development, teaching, and inspiration. In the self-development menu, there are several features, including: (1) Self-Training Feature contains training modules specifically designed for teachers to learn independently. According to (Aulia et al., 2023), this feature includes various brief training topics, enabling teachers to conduct training at their convenience, anytime and anywhere, related to the Merdeka curriculum. (2) Community Feature serves as a platform for teachers to share inspiration and experiences through learning communities. According to (Aulia et al., 2023), this feature includes various learning communities where teachers can share best practices from across Indonesia and use it as a space for learning and discussion with other teachers. (3) Principal Selection Feature is designed to facilitate the selection process for the position of school principal. (4) Performance

Management Feature is a tool to monitor teacher performance to ensure the achievement of expected standards.

In the teaching menu, there are several features, including: (1) CP/ATP provides references on Learning Outcomes (CP) and Learning Objective Flow (ATP) for each educational level. (2) Teaching Materials contains references on teaching modules, Lesson Plans (RPP), teaching materials, books, and project modules. According to (Aulia et al., 2023), this feature includes teaching material references according to specific subjects and phases to support the teaching process, including learning resources, teaching modules, and project modules. (3) Student Assessment is a tool to assess student learning progress, which serves as the basis for designing lessons. According to (Aulia et al., 2023), this feature includes diagnostic assessment question packages based on specific stages and topics, which can be used by teachers to gain deeper insights into students' progress and learning outcomes, as well as a tool to perform initial analysis on literacy and numeracy learning. (4) Class Feature provides data and analysis of students' competencies based on assessment results in the classroom.

In the inspiration menu, there are several features, including: (1) Inspirational Videos contains reference videos for teaching practices. (2) Evidence of Work includes teachers' works in the form of articles, teaching materials, and teaching modules. According to (Aulia et al., 2023), this feature serves as a documentation portfolio for teachers and school principals, showcasing their performance, competencies, and achievements throughout their careers, which can be shared with other educators. (3) Best Practices includes selected articles and videos to assist teachers in practicing student-centered teaching. According to (Aulia et al., 2023), this feature contains a collection of curated inspirational videos created by the Ministry of Education and Culture and experts, which can be used as reference material to enhance teachers' competencies as educators.

5) Availability of Assessment

This indicator measures the extent of assessment services available on the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) to help evaluate the progress of teachers in the self-paced training process. On the Merdeka Mengajar platform, assessment services are available to help teachers evaluate their progress. These assessment services take the form of post-tests, which allow teachers to measure their understanding and skills acquired during the training.

With these assessments, teachers can more easily identify areas that need improvement and better understand their progress in terms of teaching competencies. The variety of assessment services supports teachers in conducting more comprehensive evaluations, which in turn helps them plan the necessary professional development steps.

The assessments provided on the Merdeka Mengajar platform encourage teachers to complete their training thoroughly and to understand the competencies they aim to achieve.

3. Teachers' Pedagogical Competence at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah

1) Mastery of Learners' Characteristics

Based on an interview with Ms. Siti Qoribah, a teacher at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah, understanding the unique characteristics and needs of each child in the classroom requires initial assessments and observations. Through assessments, teachers can identify various aspects of children's development, including cognitive, social-emotional, and physical dimensions. Initial observations are also crucial for recognizing individual abilities and special interests, enabling teachers to tailor teaching approaches accordingly. This understanding helps teachers design learning activities that support children's individual potential and accommodate differences in their development.

Understanding the characteristics of early childhood learners is particularly vital for teachers in implementing classroom learning activities, especially under the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers can identify students' characteristics through various methods, such as engaging in communication and observing students during learning activities. By conducting scientific activities, teachers can identify children's traits and learning styles. These characteristics become an important consideration for teachers when deciding on learning strategies for their students. Effective teaching strategies require a deep understanding of students' characteristics. If teachers understand these characteristics, they can select appropriate learning strategies for each child, as stated by (Sofiana & Juwita, 2024).

According to Ratri (Sofiana & Juwita, 2024), a good teacher is one who understands that teaching is not merely about speaking in front of the class or listening passively. Teachers must demonstrate not only what they aim to teach but also how students can master and apply new knowledge and skills. Therefore, mastering learners' characteristics can help teachers address problems that may arise during the learning process.

2) The Ability to Conduct Educational and Dialogical Learning in Schools

To create an educational and engaging learning environment, teachers at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah encourage active student participation in various classroom activities while fostering a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere. This approach ensures that children feel free to express themselves without fear or pressure.

Additionally, teachers at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah employ discussion or conversational methods. Through this approach, children feel heard and are encouraged to share their opinions freely. This not only promotes communication skills but also supports positive and constructive interactions among students.

Teachers must be capable of designing learning experiences that are engaging, innovative, and dynamic. Furthermore, they need to apply various approaches, strategies, methods, and techniques in a creative and innovative manner to ensure the learning process remains educational and inspiring (Sofiana & Juwita, 2024).

3) The Ability to Establish Interactive Communication with Learners

Teachers at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah foster interactive and enjoyable communication during classroom learning by actively listening and taking on the role of facilitators. They create a safe, comfortable, and pleasant atmosphere where children feel valued and encouraged to interact actively. This approach helps children become more open, confident, and free to express themselves in a supportive learning environment.

However, teachers acknowledge challenges, particularly in selecting appropriate learning media for children.

4) Mastery of Learning Theories and Principles of Teaching

TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah implements teaching methods aligned with contemporary developments. The school employs constructivist and humanist learning approaches, as well as discussion-based methods.

The constructivist approach encourages children to build their knowledge through direct experiences and interactions with their environment. This method fosters active learning, allowing children to develop a deep understanding of concepts through exploration and discovery.

The humanist approach emphasizes child-centered learning, addressing emotional and social needs to create a supportive environment for holistic development. The discussion method provides opportunities for children to share their thoughts and listen to their peers, fostering early communication skills and empathy.

5) The Ability to Develop Learners' Potential

Teachers at TK IT Muthmainnah support children in developing their cognitive, physical, and social potential through interactive learning and activities that capture their interest. By providing hands-on activities, teachers encourage children to learn through play, fostering their enthusiasm for active participation.

In the cognitive domain, interactive activities are designed to stimulate thinking skills, such as solving simple problems or introducing basic concepts through educational games.

However, challenges arise due to differences in children's potential and limitations in the availability of suitable learning media to support their development.

6) Ability to develop curricula and syllabi, including the design and implementation of educational and dialogical learning

The TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah teacher uses teaching modules as the primary guide in the learning process. The teacher adapts the lesson plan according to the abilities and developmental needs of each child, ensuring that the learning

process is effective and meaningful. The teacher frequently makes adjustments and adds creativity to the syllabus to better align with the characteristics of early childhood. These adjustments are made by tailoring the content and teaching methods to make them more relevant and engaging for the children.

According to (Sofiana & Juwita, 2024), if students are observed to be actively engaged in learning activities, it indicates that the teacher has successfully implemented pedagogical competencies within the curriculum of the independent learning program.

However, the challenges faced include the limitations of the teacher's capabilities and difficulty in designing activity ideas.

7) Ability to utilize learning technology

The teacher at Integrated Islamic Kindergarten (TK Islam Terpadu) Muthmainnah states that in early childhood education, technology is used as a tool to enhance student understanding and engagement. One method frequently employed by the teacher in lessons is the use of educational videos.

Technology is also utilized by the teacher in preparing storytelling activities, making the stories more engaging and easier for students to understand. This approach makes the learning process more interactive and aligns with the interests of children in the digital era. The teacher believes that the use of technology supports student involvement in learning activities at the early childhood education level. Technologies like educational videos capture children's interest with dynamic visuals and sounds, making them more interested and focused on the material being presented.

Through technology, teachers can create a more interactive learning experience, where children not only listen or watch but can also interact with the learning content. This helps increase active participation among the children, making learning more engaging and relevant to them.

According to Saputra in (Sofiana & Juwita, 2024), learning technology is a supporting tool to help facilitate the achievement of learning goals and the development of competencies, making it easier to present data, information, learning materials, and cultural variations. Technology is no longer unfamiliar to us in this modern age. Teachers are required to understand technology in line with its developments. This technology also helps make it easier for teachers to manage learning, such as the use of projectors to assist in the learning process, allowing children to focus and stay on track while viewing the content presented by the teacher, ensuring that the learning process is organized and effective.

However, challenges faced include limited knowledge and skills in using technology.

8) Ability to instill attitudes, character, and morals in students

The teacher at Integrated Islamic Kindergarten (TK IT) Muthmainnah teaches values of character, attitude, and morals to children through habituation, storytelling, and specially

designed discussions that are integrated into daily activities. Values such as honesty, cooperation, and responsibility are conveyed naturally through habituation, where children are encouraged to consistently perform positive actions, such as greeting others, sharing, and tidying up toys after playtime.

According to an interview with Mrs. Rini, a teacher at TK Islam Terpadu Muthmainnah, to help children learn positive attitudes and character, the teacher uses fun learning and play activities. One method applied is the character pillar activity, which is delivered to children every day for 10-20 minutes.

This activity includes games, stories, and brief discussions focused on values such as honesty, empathy, and teamwork. Through this approach, children not only gain theoretical understanding of positive character traits but also have the opportunity to apply them in real-life situations. In an interactive and enjoyable way, children can more easily internalize positive attitudes and character in their daily lives. However, the challenge faced is the habituation of character traits at home.

4. Use of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform in Enhancing Pedagogical Competence of Teachers at Integrated Islamic Kindergarten Muthmainnah

The Merdeka Mengajar platform provides various tips and examples of effective teaching for kindergarten children. This material helps teachers design activities that are suitable for the characteristics of early childhood, offering approaches that are engaging and easy to understand. With these references, teachers can more easily develop teaching methods that are effective, interactive, and support the holistic development of children.

The Merdeka Mengajar platform assists teachers by providing examples of effective communication and ideas for interactive activities for early childhood learning. This support enables teachers to create a more engaging learning environment, allowing children to more easily understand the material and actively participate in the learning process. These examples also help teachers implement communication strategies that support optimal child engagement in the classroom.

The Merdeka Mengajar platform helps teachers understand learning theories and principles that are suitable for kindergarten children. By providing relevant materials, the platform supports teachers in developing appropriate and effective approaches for early childhood education. This helps teachers tailor their teaching methods to meet the developmental needs of children, making the teaching and learning process more meaningful and beneficial.

The Merdeka Mengajar platform provides materials and activities that help teachers develop the potential of each child. Through various modules, activity examples, and approaches suitable for early childhood, this platform supports teachers in understanding the individual needs of children and encourages

optimal development in cognitive, socio-emotional, motor, and language aspects.

The Merdeka Mengajar platform provides guides and examples for designing lessons that align with the Merdeka Curriculum. The available materials are designed to help teachers meet curriculum objectives, adapt teaching methods to student needs, and implement relevant teaching strategies for various educational levels, including early childhood education.

The Merdeka Mengajar platform provides various tools, examples, and technology guides that are useful for supporting learning in kindergarten classrooms. These features help teachers use technology effectively, such as educational videos and apps, which make learning interactive and enjoyable for children. The guides are designed to help teachers integrate technology according to the learning needs of early childhood children.

The Merdeka Mengajar platform provides a variety of materials and strategies that support teachers in instilling positive values in children. With diverse materials, teachers can use these guides to consistently teach character values, such as honesty, discipline, and cooperation, in the classroom.

Based on the statements above, it can be concluded that the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) can help improve the pedagogical competence of teachers at Integrated Islamic Kindergarten Muthmainnah. Although there are still some challenges, such as some teachers not completing the training fully—only reaching the post-test and not moving to real action—there are also issues with time adjustment and limited quotas. Furthermore, the use of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) can be influenced by factors such as location, age, and the educational level of the teacher. One significant factor is age, where older teachers often face challenges in adapting to new technologies and teaching methods. Additionally, the presentation of material, especially in the form of videos, can make some teachers feel bored, particularly if the duration is too long or not interactive.

This is in line with the research conducted by (Rahmadani & Kamaluddin, 2023). The results show that the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) has great potential in enhancing teachers' competencies and supporting the improvement of learning quality in Vocational High Schools. With a deep understanding of the goals, benefits, and scope of PMM, this platform can contribute significantly to educational development.

Based on the results of the testing and discussion presented, it can be concluded that the use of the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) and self-efficacy have a significant impact on the competencies of teachers at State Vocational High Schools in Pasaman Regency (Isnayetti & Susanto, 2024).

The use of PMM also provides an opportunity for teachers to develop their competencies, particularly in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This platform can help teachers improve the quality of student learning, which is the primary goal in education. By using PMM, teachers can enhance student learning outcomes while also improving

student retention. PMM also offers teachers the chance to share experiences, exchange ideas, and collaborate with their colleagues. Thus, PMM can serve as a platform for teachers to enhance their pedagogical competencies and the quality of teaching, as well as improve their performance and competencies through creativity developed by themselves (Nafila, 2024).

V. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) is effective in enhancing the pedagogical competencies of teachers at Integrated Islamic Kindergarten Muthmainnah. Teachers utilize PMM features, such as educational videos and self-paced training, to develop their teaching skills. PMM also provides assessments to monitor the progress of teachers. Challenges encountered include internet access issues and some teachers who have not fully completed the training. Nevertheless, PMM has great potential to support the improvement of teaching quality and is worthy of continued development.

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