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Assessing the Alignment Between Graduate Competencies and Workplace Needs: Evidence from Indonesian Language Education Graduates at State Islamic University of North Sumatera

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Keywords

Graduate competency alignment; tracer study; workplace needs; Indonesian language education.

Abstract

The alignment between graduate competencies and workplace needs is an important indicator of higher education quality. This study examines the relevance of the competencies of graduates from the Indonesian Language Education Study Program at the State Islamic University of North Sumatera (UINSU) from the perspectives of alumni and employers. A descriptive qualitative approach, supported by quantitative data from tracer studies and employer satisfaction surveys, was employed. Participants included alumni and five employers from educational institutions. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. The findings show that graduate competencies generally meet workplace demands, as reflected in an employment rate of 86.6%, with 93.3% of alumni working in the education sector. Employers reported high satisfaction with graduates' ethical behavior (76.7% rated very good), educational expertise (70%), communication skills (66.7%), self-development (66.7%), information technology skills (63.3%), and teamwork (63.3%). Interviews also confirmed graduates' strengths in pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies. However, improvements are needed in foreign language proficiency, instructional innovation, digital learning technologies, and technology-based learning media development. The study recommends strengthening the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum, expanding field practice opportunities, and integrating twenty-first-century skills to improve graduate competitiveness and professional readiness.

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Introduction

Higher education institutions bear a strategic responsibility to produce graduates who not only demonstrate academic excellence but also possess competencies that are aligned with workplace needed demands. In the contemporary higher education landscape,

institutional success is no longer measured solely by the number of graduates produced, but also by graduates' ability to adapt, contribute, and compete effectively in professional environments (Mufida et al. 2024). Consequently, the alignment between graduate competencies and employer expectations has become a key indicator of higher education quality and effectiveness.

Rapid technological advancement, globalization, digital transformation, and evolving educational paradigms have generated new demands for graduate competencies (Ulfaha et al., 2025). Today's workplace requires graduates who not only possess strong disciplinary knowledge but also demonstrate communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and digital literacy skills. Within the education sector, these expectations are even more demanding, as teachers are required to integrate technology into instructional practices, develop innovative learning media, and create student-centered learning experiences that support meaningful engagement and learning outcomes.

The Undergraduate Program in Indonesian Language Education at State Islamic University of North Sumatera (UINSU) is designed to produce graduates who are competent as Indonesian language educators, novice researchers, instructional material developers, editors, and professionals in other fields related to language and education. To achieve these objectives, the program has developed a curriculum aligned with the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI), the National Standards for Higher Education (SN-Dikti), and the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), ensuring that graduates acquire the knowledge, skills, and professional competencies required in contemporary educational and professional contexts (Pahrudin, Romlah, dan Murtando 2024). As part of its quality assurance system, the Indonesian Language Education Study Program regularly conducts tracer studies and graduate employer satisfaction surveys. The 2025 tracer study revealed that of the 30 alumni respondents, 26 graduates (86.6%) were employed, while 4 graduates (13.4%) were either unemployed or did not provide employment information. Most graduates secured employment within one to three months after graduation, indicating a relatively high level of employability and successful integration into the workplace. Furthermore, 93.3% of employed graduates worked within the education sector, including schools, madrasahs, and Islamic boarding schools. These findings suggest a strong alignment between graduates' academic background and their professional occupations (Luthfiyah, Subroto, dan Sakti 2025).

The tracer study also demonstrated graduates' commitment to continuous professional development. Five alumni had pursued master's degree programs, while eleven graduates enrolled in the Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG). These findings indicate that graduates are not only capable of entering the workforce but are also committed to enhancing their academic qualifications and professional competencies (Herbert et al. 2020). In addition, the graduate employer satisfaction survey reported highly positive evaluations of the quality of graduates from the Indonesian Language Education Study Program. Ethical behavior received a "very good" rating from 76.7% of employers and a "good" rating from 23.3%. Educational expertise was rated "very good" by 70% of employers and "good" by 30%. Communication skills were assessed as "very good" by 66.7% of employers and "good" by 33.3%. Similarly, self-

development competencies received a “very good” rating from 66.7% of employers, while information technology skills and teamwork abilities were each rated “very good” by 63.3% of respondents.

Despite these positive outcomes, the survey identified foreign language proficiency as an area requiring further improvement. Only 26.7% of employers rated graduates’ foreign language skills as “very good,” while 63.3% rated them as “good” and 10% as “fair.” This finding indicates that opportunities remain to strengthen graduates’ competitiveness in response to globalization and the internationalization of education.

Although the quantitative findings from the tracer study and employer satisfaction survey provide valuable insights into graduate outcomes, they do not fully explain how employers perceive graduates’ competencies, which competencies are considered most relevant to workplace demands, and which areas require further enhancement (Mufida et al. 2024). Therefore, a more in-depth qualitative investigation is necessary to develop a comprehensive understanding of the alignment between graduate competencies and workplace needs based on the experiences and perceptions of both alumni and employers. Based on this background, the present study aims to examine and reflect upon the alignment of graduate competencies of the Undergraduate Program in Indonesian Language Education at State Islamic University of North Sumatera with workplace requirements from the perspectives of alumni and graduate employers.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to obtain an in-depth understanding of graduate users’ and alumni’s experiences, perceptions, and evaluations regarding the alignment between graduate competencies and workplace demands. A qualitative design was considered appropriate as it enables a comprehensive exploration of stakeholders’ perspectives on the relevance and applicability of academic competencies within professional settings. Qualitative descriptive research is particularly suitable for studies aiming to provide a rich, straightforward, and contextually grounded description of a phenomenon as experienced by participants, without extensive theoretical abstraction or interpretation (Pahleviannur et al. 2022). Furthermore Nasution (2023) emphasize that qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to social phenomena through the collection and analysis of detailed narrative data within natural settings. In the context of this study, the qualitative descriptive approach facilitated a comprehensive examination of how graduate competencies are perceived, utilized, and evaluated by employers and alumni in relation to the demands of the contemporary workplace. The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with five graduate users representing various educational institutions and alumni of the Indonesian Language Education (Tadris Bahasa Indonesia) Study Program at State Islamic University of North Sumatera. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct experience in observing, assessing, and supervising alumni performance in workplace environments. Their insights were considered valuable for

evaluating the extent to which graduate competencies correspond to institutional and professional expectations.

Secondary data were obtained from the 2025 Tracer Study Report and the 2025 Graduate User Satisfaction Survey of the Indonesian Language Education Study Program. The quantitative information contained in these documents was not subjected to statistical hypothesis testing; rather, it served as supplementary evidence to support and enrich the interpretation of qualitative findings derived from the interview data. Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, tracer study questionnaires and graduate user satisfaction surveys were administered to collect baseline information regarding graduate employment outcomes and stakeholder assessments. Second, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with graduate users and alumni to explore their experiences, perceptions, and evaluations concerning the competencies developed through the study program. Third, a document analysis was carried out on tracer study reports, graduate user satisfaction reports, and curriculum documents to provide contextual understanding and support data triangulation. Consistent with the qualitative research framework proposed by Creswell & Poth (2016), the study subsequently proceeded through the stages of data organization, coding, categorization, theme development, interpretation, and verification. Interview transcripts and documentary evidence were systematically organized and coded to identify recurring patterns related to graduate competency alignment with workplace demands. The coding process involved both inductive and deductive approaches, enabling the emergence of themes grounded in participants' perspectives while remaining aligned with the conceptual framework of graduate competencies. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by comparing evidence obtained from interviews, survey reports, tracer study data, and curriculum documents. Furthermore, the interpretation stage emphasized the construction of meaning from multiple data sources, allowing the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of how graduate competencies correspond to stakeholder expectations and contemporary workforce requirements. This analytical procedure reflects the iterative nature of qualitative inquiry, in which data collection, analysis, and interpretation occur concurrently to generate findings that are both contextually rich and empirically robust.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive qualitative analysis model developed by Miles et al. (2014). During the data condensation phase, data obtained from tracer studies, employer satisfaction surveys, interviews, and supporting documents were systematically coded, categorized, and reduced to identify meaningful patterns and themes. Subsequently, the organized data were presented through thematic matrices and narrative descriptions to facilitate interpretation and comparison across data sources. The conclusion drawing and verification stage involved an iterative process of reviewing emerging findings, examining relationships among categories, and validating interpretations throughout the research process. Consistent with contemporary qualitative research principles, data analysis was conducted recursively, allowing ongoing refinement of interpretations as new evidence emerged. To enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the study, the research adopted the quality criteria of

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as recommended in recent qualitative inquiry literature. Furthermore, methodological and source triangulation were employed by comparing evidence derived from questionnaires, interviews, and documentary sources. This systematic verification process strengthened the credibility of the findings and ensured that the conclusions accurately reflected the alignment between graduate competencies and labor market requirements.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Findings of Graduate Employer Satisfaction Survey and Tracer Study

The quantitative findings derived from the Graduate Employer Satisfaction Survey and Tracer Study provide valuable insights into the extent to which the competencies of graduates from the Indonesian Language Education Program (Tadris Bahasa Indonesia) at State Islamic University of North Sumatera align with workplace expectations and professional requirements.

No	Aspek Penilaian	Sangat Baik (%)	Baik (%)	Cukup (%)	Kurang (%)
1	Etika Berperilaku	76,7	23,3	0	0
2	Keahlian Bidang Ilmu Pendidikan	70,0	30,0	0	0
3	Kemampuan Berbahasa Asing	26,7	63,3	10,0	0
4	Kemampuan Penggunaan Teknologi Informasi	63,3	36,7	0	0
5	Kemampuan Berkomunikasi	66,7	33,3	0	0
6	Kemampuan Bekerja Sama	63,3	36,7	0	0
7	Kemampuan Pengembangan Diri	66,7	33,3	0	0

Table 1. Graduate Employer Satisfaction Survey Results of the Indonesian Language Education Program (Tadris Bahasa Indonesia), State Islamic University of North Sumatera 2025

Based on Table 1, the aspect that received the highest level of employer satisfaction was professional ethics and conduct, with 76.7% of respondents rating graduates as very good, followed by expertise in educational sciences, which received a very good rating from 70.0% of respondents. These findings indicate that employers perceive graduates as possessing strong integrity, responsibility, discipline, and professional competence in carrying out their duties as educators.

The aspects of communication skills and self-development competence each received very good ratings from 66.7% of respondents, while information technology skills and teamwork and collaboration skills received very good ratings from 63.3% of respondents. These results suggest that graduates have developed the social and professional competencies necessary to perform effectively and successfully within workplace environments.

In contrast, foreign language proficiency received the lowest proportion of very good ratings, at 26.7%. Meanwhile, 63.3% of respondents rated this competency as good, and 10.0% rated it as fair. Although the overall assessment remains positive, this finding indicates that foreign language proficiency remains an area requiring further enhancement in future graduate competency development efforts.

Graduate tracer studies serve as an important instrument for evaluating the relevance of higher education outcomes to labor market demands and stakeholder expectations. Through tracer studies, higher education institutions can assess graduate employability, occupational

relevance, career development trajectories, and the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. In this study, a tracer survey was administered to alumni of the Indonesian Language Education Program (Tadris Bahasa Indonesia) to examine their employment status, job waiting period, occupational alignment, and engagement in further academic and professional development. The results of the tracer study are summarized in Table 2.

No.	Indikator	Hasil
1	Jumlah Responden	30 Alumni
2	Alumni Telah Bekerja	26 Alumni (86,6%)
3	Alumni Belum Bekerja/Tidak Memberikan Informasi	4 Alumni (13,4%)
4	Masa Tunggu Kerja Dominan	1–3 Bulan Setelah Lulus
5	Alumni Bekerja pada Bidang Pendidikan	28 Alumni (93,3%)
6	Alumni Melanjutkan Studi S-2	5 Alumni
7	Alumni Mengikuti Pendidikan Profesi Guru (PPG)	11 Alumni

Table 2. Tracer Study Results of Alumni of the Indonesian Language Education Program (Tadris Bahasa Indonesia), State Islamic University of North Sumatera 2025

Based on Table 2, the employment rate of graduates from the Indonesian Language Education Program (Tadris Bahasa Indonesia) is relatively high, reaching 86.6%, with 26 out of 30 respondents having secured employment. Furthermore, most graduates obtained employment within one to three months after graduation, indicating that they possess strong employability and competitiveness in entering the labor market.

In addition, 93.3% of graduates are employed in the education sector, including schools, madrasahs, and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). This high percentage demonstrates a strong alignment between the competencies acquired during their studies and the professional fields in which graduates are employed. The finding suggests that the graduate profile established by the study program is highly relevant to labor market demands, particularly within the educational sector.

On the other hand, five graduates have pursued master's degree studies, while eleven graduates have enrolled in the Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG). These data indicate that graduates possess a strong motivation to enhance their academic qualifications and professional competencies as part of their commitment to continuous professional development and lifelong learning. Such trends reflect graduates' awareness of the importance of continuously improving their knowledge and skills in response to evolving educational and professional challenges.

Alignment of Graduate Competencies with Workplace Demands

Evaluating graduate competencies constitutes a critical component of higher education quality assurance systems, as it reflects the extent to which the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) formulated by an academic program are capable of addressing the expectations of graduate employers and the evolving demands of the workplace. Drawing upon tracer study findings, employer satisfaction surveys, stakeholder interviews, and alumni interviews, the present study found that the competencies of graduates from the Indonesian Language Education Program (Tadris Bahasa Indonesia), State Islamic University of Sumatera (UINSU), are generally well aligned with workforce requirements, particularly within the educational sector.

The graduate employment rate reached 86.6%, with most graduates securing employment within one to three months after graduation. This finding indicates a relatively high level of employability among graduates. Furthermore, 93.3% of employed alumni were working in educational fields directly related to their academic background. The high degree of occupational alignment suggests that the competencies acquired during the study period possess substantial relevance to workplace requirements.

From the perspective of employers, graduate competence is not solely measured by the ability to obtain employment but also by the capacity to perform professional responsibilities effectively after entering the workforce. Therefore, interviews with graduate employers were conducted to identify competencies perceived as highly relevant as well as those requiring further enhancement. In addition, the findings provide empirical evidence that the curriculum and learning experiences offered by the Indonesian Language Education Program in State Islamic University of Sumatera have successfully facilitated the development of competencies that are relevant to current labor market expectations. The high employment absorption rate, short transition period from graduation to employment, and strong occupational relevance collectively indicate that the program has effectively translated its intended learning outcomes into competencies valued by employers. This finding is consistent with the principles of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), which emphasize the alignment between learning outcomes, curriculum implementation, and graduate performance in professional contexts (Biggs, Tang, dan Kennedy 2022). Moreover, the results suggest that the program has been responsive to stakeholder needs by equipping graduates with a combination of pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies that support workplace readiness (Jaya, Hambali, dan Fakhurrozi 2023). Consequently, the alignment between graduate competencies and workplace demands not only reflects the effectiveness of the program's quality assurance mechanisms but also demonstrates its contribution to producing graduates who are capable of adapting to the dynamic requirements of the contemporary educational sector.

Pedagogical Competence as the Core Strength of Graduates

The findings reveal that pedagogical competence emerged as the most prominent and highly valued competency among graduates. All informants acknowledged that alumni demonstrated strong capabilities in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning activities. According to employers, graduates were able to design instructional plans in accordance with curriculum requirements, develop teaching modules, construct assessment instruments, and manage classroom learning systematically. These competencies indicate that the educational experiences provided during undergraduate study successfully established a solid pedagogical foundation for graduates entering the teaching profession. This finding is consistent with the employer satisfaction survey, which showed that educational expertise was rated “very good” by 70% of respondents and “good” by the remaining 30%. The absence of “fair” or “poor” ratings indicates that graduates’ pedagogical competencies have largely met stakeholder expectations.

From the alumni perspective, this achievement can be attributed to teaching practicum experiences, microteaching activities, and internship programs undertaken during their studies.

Alumni reported that these practical experiences served as essential preparation for independently managing classrooms after graduation. Nevertheless, employers also highlighted the need to strengthen graduates' capacity to implement innovative instructional approaches. Some graduates were perceived as still relying on conventional teaching methods and had not yet optimally adopted project-based learning, differentiated instruction, or problem-based learning. These findings suggest that while foundational pedagogical competencies have been successfully developed, greater emphasis on twenty-first-century pedagogical practices remains necessary. In contemporary educational settings, teachers are expected not only to transmit knowledge but also to function as facilitators capable of creating meaningful, collaborative, and student-centered learning experiences. Consequently, strengthening innovative pedagogical competencies should become a strategic priority in future curriculum development.

To further interpret these findings, the strong pedagogical competence demonstrated by graduates reflects the effectiveness of the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) approach implemented within the study program, where learning outcomes are systematically aligned with professional teaching standards and labor market expectations. The ability of graduates to design learning activities, manage classrooms, and conduct assessments indicates that they have successfully achieved the essential competencies required of professional educators. This finding corroborates recent research emphasizing that pedagogical competence remains a critical determinant of teacher effectiveness, significantly influencing instructional quality, student engagement, and learning outcomes (Lauermann dan ten Hagen 2021). Furthermore, the positive evaluations provided by employers suggest that the program has effectively bridged the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical teaching skills through experiential learning activities such as microteaching, teaching practicums, and internships. These findings are also consistent with contemporary perspectives on teacher preparation, which highlight the importance of authentic learning experiences in developing professional competence and workplace readiness (Pan 2023). However, the rapid transformation of educational environments in the era of Education 4.0 requires teachers to possess not only foundational pedagogical knowledge but also the capacity to implement innovative, technology-enhanced, and student-centered learning approaches. Consequently, continuous curriculum enhancement aimed at strengthening adaptive pedagogical skills, digital pedagogy, creative instructional design, and innovative teaching practices is essential to ensure that future graduates remain relevant and competitive in increasingly dynamic educational contexts (Aithal, Prabhu, dan Aithal 2024).

Professional Competence and Mastery of Indonesian Language Education

Professional competence encompasses subject matter expertise, academic proficiency, and the ability to advance disciplinary knowledge within a specific field of study. The findings indicate that employers generally perceived graduates as possessing strong mastery of Indonesian language content and the ability to teach it effectively. This competence was reflected in graduates' understanding of linguistic concepts, language skills, Indonesian

literature, and their ability to develop instructional materials appropriate to learning objectives. Employers also observed that graduates were capable of preparing learning instruments that demonstrated a clear understanding of basic competencies, learning outcomes, and instructional goals. The positive evaluations of professional competence suggest that the curriculum of the Indonesian Language Education Program has successfully cultivated graduates with academic qualifications aligned with the intended graduate profile.

However, interview findings also revealed that contemporary educational contexts require broader professional competencies beyond content mastery alone. Indonesian language teachers are increasingly expected to foster student literacy, cultivate reading cultures, integrate technology into language instruction, and develop students' critical and creative thinking skills through language and literature learning. Accordingly, graduates' professional competencies should continue to be strengthened so that they encompass not only mastery of subject matter but also the capacity to transform disciplinary knowledge into meaningful learning experiences relevant to learners.

These findings are consistent with recent studies on teacher professionalism in Indonesia, which emphasize that professional competence in the twenty-first century extends beyond subject-matter mastery to include the ability to integrate pedagogy, technology, literacy development, and innovative learning strategies. Research has shown that teachers are increasingly required to combine content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge to create meaningful and engaging learning experiences for students through the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Shambare dan Simuja 2024). In addition, contemporary educational reforms and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum demand that teachers facilitate critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills while effectively utilizing digital technologies in classroom instruction (Hunaepi dan Suharta 2024). Therefore, the strong professional competence demonstrated by graduates of the Indonesian Language Education Program indicates that the curriculum has successfully established a solid disciplinary foundation. However, continuous curriculum enhancement remains necessary to equip graduates with adaptive professional competencies, particularly in digital literacy, instructional innovation, and technology integration, enabling them to meet the evolving demands of education and contribute effectively to student learning outcomes (Asterhan dan Lefstein 2024).

Social Competence and Professional Ethics as Major Graduate Strengths

One of the most notable findings of this study is the strong appreciation expressed by employers regarding graduates' ethical conduct and professional behavior. The employer satisfaction survey revealed that 76.7% of respondents rated graduates' ethical behavior as "very good," while 23.3% rated it as "good." These quantitative findings were further supported by interview data indicating that graduates were widely recognized as courteous, responsible, disciplined, and capable of maintaining positive professional relationships within their workplaces. Employers emphasized that graduates' adaptability and interpersonal skills

significantly contributed to their professional success. Alumni were perceived as capable of interacting professionally with school principals, colleagues, students, and parents.

These findings demonstrate that the program has succeeded not only in developing academic competencies but also in fostering graduates' professional character. Within the teaching profession, social and personal competencies occupy a particularly important position because teachers serve as role models for both students and the broader community. The results further suggest that character education integrated into the learning process of the Indonesian Language Education Program has contributed positively to graduate quality.

The findings of this study are consistent with contemporary research emphasizing that social competence and professional ethics constitute essential dimensions of teacher effectiveness and employability in the twenty-first century. Beyond subject matter expertise, educational institutions increasingly expect graduates to demonstrate integrity, responsibility, adaptability, empathy, and effective interpersonal communication in diverse professional settings. According Lițoiu et al., (2025), socio-emotional competencies, including collaboration, empathy, self-regulation, and ethical behavior, significantly influence workplace performance and long-term career success. Similarly, Franch (2020) highlights that teachers are expected not only to facilitate learning but also to model ethical values, social responsibility, and positive citizenship for learners. The strong employer appreciation of graduates' professional conduct in this study therefore indicates that the Indonesian Language Education Program has successfully integrated character formation with academic preparation. Such integration is particularly important in preparing future educators who are capable of responding to increasingly complex educational and societal challenges while maintaining high standards of professional ethics and social responsibility (Silalahi 2025).

Communication and Collaboration Competencies in the Workplace

Communication competence was identified as another highly valued graduate attribute. Employer survey results showed that 66.7% of respondents rated graduates' communication skills as "very good," while 33.3% rated them as "good." As graduates of an Indonesian language education program, communication skills constitute a fundamental asset in performing teaching responsibilities. Employers reported that graduates were able to deliver instructional content clearly, utilize communicative language effectively, and establish productive interactions with students.

Similarly, teamwork and collaboration skills received highly favorable evaluations, with 63.3% of employers assigning a "very good" rating and 36.7% assigning a "good" rating. These findings indicate that graduates possess strong collaborative capabilities in implementing various school programs and activities. Communication and collaboration are widely recognized as essential twenty-first-century skills required in contemporary workplaces. Therefore, the strong performance demonstrated in these areas suggests that graduates are adequately prepared to adapt to dynamic and collaborative professional environments.

A deeper analysis of these findings suggests that the positive evaluations of communication and collaboration competencies are closely associated with the nature of the

Indonesian Language Education curriculum, which emphasizes language proficiency, classroom interaction, presentation skills, collaborative learning, and teaching practicum experiences. The consistently high ratings provided by employers indicate that graduates are not merely capable of transmitting instructional content but are also able to function effectively within the social and organizational dynamics of educational institutions (Kaputa, Loučánová, dan Tejerina-Gaite 2022). This is particularly important because the teaching profession increasingly requires educators to engage in collaborative decision-making, participate in professional learning communities, coordinate with colleagues across disciplines, and communicate effectively with diverse stakeholders. The findings further imply that communication and collaboration competencies have contributed to graduates' successful workplace adaptation, as evidenced by their high employment rate and strong alignment with educational-sector occupations (Nkolika 2024). From an employability perspective, these competencies may serve as strategic assets that enhance graduates' professional performance beyond disciplinary knowledge alone. Therefore, the favorable employer perceptions suggest that the program has been successful in fostering transferable skills that are highly valued in contemporary educational environments, where professional effectiveness is increasingly determined by an individual's ability to communicate, cooperate, and build productive professional relationships within complex organizational settings.

Digital Literacy and Technological Competence as Developmental Challenges

Although information technology skills received positive evaluations, with 63.3% of respondents rating them as “very good” and 36.7% as “good,” interview findings indicate a continuing need to strengthen graduates' digital competencies. Employers acknowledged that graduates were generally proficient in using basic applications such as Microsoft Office, presentation software, and digital communication platforms. However, current educational demands extend significantly beyond these foundational technological skills. Schools and madrasahs increasingly require teachers who are capable of developing digital learning media, managing Learning Management Systems (LMS), producing instructional videos, utilizing digital assessment applications, and integrating technologies into teaching and learning processes.

Several employers noted that these advanced competencies require further development to enable graduates to remain competitive within increasingly digitalized educational environments. This finding indicates the existence of a gap between graduates' current digital capabilities and the technological competencies expected by employers. From an Outcome-Based Education (OBE) perspective, these findings provide important evidence for curriculum revision efforts aimed at enhancing responsiveness to ongoing developments in educational technology.

Employer/stakeholder feedback suggests that employability alone does not necessarily reflect readiness to meet the evolving technological expectations of contemporary educational settings. While graduates demonstrate adequate competence in operating basic digital tools, the rapid digital transformation of schools and madrasahs requires more advanced capabilities, including the design of technology-enhanced learning environments, the integration of digital

pedagogies, data-driven assessment practices, and the effective utilization of emerging technologies to support student engagement and learning outcomes. These findings highlight that digital competence should no longer be viewed merely as a supporting skill but rather as a core professional competency for twenty-first-century educators (Gümüő 2022). Consequently, the identified gap between existing graduate competencies and employer expectations underscores the need for curriculum enhancement through the integration of advanced digital literacy, educational technology innovation, and authentic technology-based learning experiences. Such efforts are essential to ensure that graduates are not only employable but also adaptable, innovative, and capable of leading educational transformation in increasingly technology-driven learning environments (Aithal dan Maiya 2023).

Self-Development Competence and Lifelong Learning

The survey results revealed that self-development competence was rated “very good” by 66.7% of respondents and “good” by 33.3%. This finding suggests that graduates possess strong motivation to continuously improve their professional capacities. Tracer study data further support this conclusion. Five alumni had pursued master’s degree programs, while eleven alumni had enrolled in the Teacher Professional Education Program (PPG). These patterns indicate a high level of awareness among graduates regarding the importance of continuous professional development.

Within the contemporary educational paradigm, lifelong learning is considered one of the key competencies that higher education graduates must possess. Such competence is increasingly important because workplace conditions evolve rapidly, requiring individuals to continuously update their knowledge and skills. Therefore, graduates’ strong motivation to pursue advanced studies and professional development programs reflects their readiness to adapt and grow in response to future professional challenges.

These findings are consistent with recent studies in the Indonesian educational context emphasizing that continuous professional development and lifelong learning have become essential components of teacher professionalism. Musa et al. (2024) found that educators who actively engage in lifelong learning demonstrate greater adaptability, technological responsiveness, collaborative capacity, and commitment to continuous improvement in professional practice. Similarly, Farihin et al. (2022) argued that ongoing professional development activities contribute significantly to strengthening teachers’ competencies and sustaining professional growth throughout their careers. Furthermore, Mardhatillah & Surjanti (2023) highlighted that participation in structured professional development programs, such as Teacher Professional Education (PPG), enhances pedagogical and professional competencies while fostering a culture of continuous learning among educators. Therefore, the tendency of graduates to pursue postgraduate studies and professional certification programs not only reflects individual motivation for self-improvement but also demonstrates the successful internalization of lifelong learning values promoted during their academic preparation. Such characteristics are particularly important for ensuring graduate resilience and adaptability in

responding to the rapidly evolving demands of contemporary education and the broader labor market.

Competency Gaps and Implications for Curriculum Development

Although graduate competencies are generally aligned with workplace needs, the study identified several areas requiring further enhancement. These areas include foreign language proficiency, advanced digital literacy, innovative pedagogical practices, digital learning media development, and the utilization of artificial intelligence-based educational technologies. These findings suggest that the primary challenge facing the program is no longer the development of foundational competencies but rather graduates' ability to adapt to transformations occurring within global educational environments. Consequently, curriculum development efforts should prioritize the integration of twenty-first-century competencies, including critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, digital literacy, and global literacy.

Overall, the findings not only demonstrate a substantial alignment between graduate competencies and workplace demands but also provide strategic directions for the future development of the Indonesian Language Education Program at UIN Sumatera Utara. Strengthening these emerging competencies is expected to enhance both the quality and competitiveness of graduates in increasingly complex and technology-driven professional environments.

The identified competency gaps also reflect broader challenges faced by teacher education institutions in Indonesia in preparing graduates for increasingly dynamic and technology-oriented educational environments. Recent studies have emphasized that curriculum transformation in higher education should not only focus on disciplinary knowledge but also foster adaptive competencies that enable graduates to respond effectively to technological disruption, globalization, and evolving workforce expectations. For instance, research by Varghese & Musthafa (2022) highlights that the integration of digital literacy, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving skills into curriculum design significantly contributes to graduate readiness for the demands of the twenty-first-century workplace. Similarly, Liu (2024) found that future educators require competencies that extend beyond pedagogical expertise, including digital innovation skills, technological adaptability, and the ability to integrate emerging technologies into meaningful learning experiences. In the Indonesian higher education context, these findings reinforce the importance of adopting a more responsive and future-oriented curriculum framework that continuously aligns learning outcomes with societal and technological developments (Murtiningsih dan Sujito 2026). Therefore, Tiawati et al. (2025) stated about strengthening foreign language competence, advanced digital literacy, innovative pedagogy, and artificial intelligence literacy should be considered strategic priorities in curriculum revision efforts to ensure that graduates remain competitive, adaptive, and capable of contributing to educational transformation at both national and global levels.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the competencies of graduates from the Bachelor's Program in Indonesian Language Education (Tadris Bahasa Indonesia) at State Islamic University of North Sumatera are generally aligned with labor market demands. The graduate employment rate of 86.6%, the predominance of employment within the education sector (93.3%), and the high level of employer satisfaction collectively indicate that the program has successfully produced graduates whose competencies are relevant to stakeholder expectations and workplace requirements.

The competencies most highly valued by employers include professional ethics, pedagogical competence, communication skills, teamwork and collaboration, self-development capacity, and information technology proficiency. However, several areas were identified as requiring further enhancement, particularly foreign language proficiency, innovative teaching practices, and the utilization of digital learning technologies.

The findings underscore the importance of strengthening the implementation of an Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum framework that emphasizes the development of twenty-first-century competencies, including digital literacy, innovative pedagogy, critical thinking skills, and foreign language proficiency. Furthermore, the study suggests that the program should expand field-based learning experiences, strengthen partnerships with schools and educational institutions, and further integrate educational technologies into teaching and learning processes. These strategic initiatives are expected to enhance graduate competitiveness, adaptability, and professional readiness in response to the evolving demands of contemporary educational and workforce environments.

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