



Instructional Leadership and the Development of Professional Learning Communities in Islamic Schools

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to examine instructional leadership and the development of professional learning communities in Islamic schools. It addresses the need to understand how principals support teacher collaboration, reflective practice, and professional learning while maintaining Islamic values as part of school culture.

Design/methods/approach – This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. The research was conducted at SDIT Al Hidayah Sumenep, an Islamic elementary school selected purposively because it actively promotes teacher collaboration and professional development. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving the principal and teachers. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through data organization, reduction, coding, theme development, and interpretation. Source and technique triangulation were applied to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

Findings – The findings show that the principal enacted instructional leadership by setting a shared direction for teacher learning, facilitating collaboration, encouraging reflective practice, motivating teachers, and supporting continuous professional development. Professional learning communities were developed through regular teacher discussions, sharing of classroom experiences, reflective dialogue, and school-based professional learning activities. Islamic values such as *shura*, togetherness, mutual advice, responsibility, and respect strengthened the collaborative culture and gave PLCs a moral and religious foundation.

Research implications/limitations – This study implies that Islamic school principals need to institutionalize PLCs as structured and value-based professional learning spaces. However, the study is limited to a single case and qualitative design, so the findings cannot be generalized broadly.

Originality/value – This study contributes to educational leadership literature by linking instructional leadership, PLC development, teacher professional learning, and Islamic school culture.

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INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of teaching and learning remains one of the central concerns in contemporary education. Schools are increasingly expected to develop learning environments that support teacher professionalism, instructional improvement, collaboration, and continuous reflection. In this context, the principal's role is not limited to administrative management but extends to instructional leadership, which focuses on improving teaching practices, developing teachers' professional capacity, and creating conditions that support student learning. Instructional leadership has been widely discussed as an important leadership approach because it places learning, curriculum, teacher development, and instructional quality at the center of school improvement. Bellibaş et al. (2021) show that principals' instructional leadership has a significant influence on instructional quality, while Liu & Hallinger (2018) emphasize the relationship between principal instructional leadership, teacher self-efficacy, and teacher professional learning.

One of the most important ways to strengthen teacher professionalism and instructional quality is through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). PLCs refer to collaborative professional spaces where teachers share a vision, engage in collective inquiry, reflect on teaching practices, discuss student learning, and develop instructional strategies together. Antinluoma et al. (2021) describe PLCs as practices that support collective professional learning, shared responsibility, and school development. Similarly, Mohd Zabidi et al. (2023) explain that teacher collaboration within PLCs involves professional dialogue, shared practice, reflective inquiry, and collective efforts to improve teaching. Through PLCs, teachers are not positioned as isolated practitioners but as members of a learning community who continuously develop their knowledge, skills, and professional identity.

The development of PLCs is closely related to school leadership. Principals play an important role in establishing a shared vision, creating time and space for teacher collaboration, encouraging reflective practice, supporting professional development, and building a collaborative school culture. Zheng et al. (2019) demonstrate that instructional leadership is related to the development of PLCs and teacher effectiveness. This means that PLCs do not develop automatically; they require leadership support, organizational commitment, and a culture that encourages teachers to learn from one another. Without strong instructional leadership, collaborative activities may become routine meetings without meaningful impact on teaching practice.

Teacher collaboration is a key element in PLC development. Collaborative professional learning enables teachers to exchange experiences, examine instructional problems, conduct reflection, and improve their teaching strategies. De Jong et al. (2022) argue that teacher learning in collaborative contexts is shaped by professional dialogue and the quality of interaction among teachers. In addition, Alzayed & Alabdulkareem (2021) highlight the importance of reflective practice in strengthening teachers' professional learning communities. These perspectives indicate that PLCs are not merely formal teacher meetings, but structured and reflective learning processes that require trust, openness, shared responsibility, and continuous inquiry.

In Islamic schools, the development of PLCs has a distinctive character because teacher collaboration is not only directed toward pedagogical improvement but also toward the strengthening of Islamic values, character formation, and religious school culture. Islamic

schools are expected to improve teaching quality while maintaining an educational environment grounded in moral and spiritual values. Therefore, PLCs in Islamic schools may serve as spaces where teachers discuss not only instructional strategies but also the integration of Islamic values into learning practices, student character development, and the cultivation of religious culture. Dewi (2024) emphasizes the importance of principal management in building religious school culture based on Islamic values, while Parjiman et al. (2023) show that Islamic values can be developed through school culture as part of educational formation.

The integration of Islamic values into PLCs is particularly relevant because collaborative teacher learning in Islamic schools can be strengthened by values such as *shura* or deliberation, mutual advice, brotherhood, responsibility, and shared commitment to educational improvement. These values can support a collaborative culture in which teachers respect one another, share experiences openly, and work collectively to improve learning. In this sense, PLCs in Islamic schools are not only professional structures but also value-based communities that combine pedagogical reflection with moral responsibility. Principal leadership becomes crucial in ensuring that PLC activities are not merely administrative routines, but meaningful professional learning processes rooted in both instructional improvement and Islamic educational values.

Despite the growing literature on instructional leadership and PLCs, studies that specifically examine how instructional leadership supports the development of PLCs in Islamic schools remain limited. Many studies on instructional leadership focus on general school contexts, teacher effectiveness, or instructional quality (Bellibaş et al., 2021; Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Zheng et al., 2019). Meanwhile, studies on PLCs often emphasize teacher collaboration, reflective practice, and professional learning without deeply examining how Islamic school culture shapes the process of collaboration (Alzayed & Alabdulkareem, 2021; Antinluoma et al., 2021; Mohd Zabidi et al., 2023). This leaves a gap in understanding how principals in Islamic schools act as instructional leaders in developing PLCs that are both professionally oriented and value-based.

This study addresses that gap by examining instructional leadership and the development of professional learning communities in Islamic schools. The study focuses on how the principal supports teacher collaboration, facilitates reflective practice, promotes continuous professional development, and integrates Islamic values into the culture of professional learning. By examining this issue in the context of an Islamic school, the study seeks to provide a more contextual understanding of how instructional leadership operates within a value-based educational environment.

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to connect instructional leadership, PLC development, teacher professional learning, and Islamic school culture. Theoretically, this study contributes to educational leadership literature by explaining how instructional leadership supports PLCs in Islamic schools. Practically, the findings are expected to provide insights for principals, teachers, and Islamic education stakeholders in developing collaborative professional learning cultures that improve teaching quality while preserving Islamic educational values.

Based on this background, this study aims to describe the role of instructional leadership in developing professional learning communities in Islamic schools. The study is

guided by the following research questions: How does the principal enact instructional leadership in developing professional learning communities? How are teacher collaboration and reflective practice facilitated within the school? How are Islamic values integrated into the development of professional learning communities?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine instructional leadership and the development of professional learning communities in an Islamic school. This design was selected because the study aimed to understand the principal's leadership practices, teacher collaboration, reflective learning processes, and the integration of Islamic values within a natural school context. The research was conducted at SDIT Al Hidayah Sumenep, an Islamic elementary school that was purposively selected because it actively promotes teacher collaboration, professional development, and learning improvement. The participants consisted of the principal and teachers who were directly involved in professional learning community activities.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted to explore the principal's role in setting instructional direction, facilitating teacher collaboration, supporting reflective practice, motivating teachers, and integrating Islamic values into professional learning activities. Observations were used to examine teacher interactions, collaborative practices, school culture, and the principal's involvement in professional development activities. Documentation was used to review school programs, teacher meeting notes, professional development schedules, and other relevant documents related to the implementation of professional learning communities.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through the stages of data organization, data reduction, coding, theme development, and interpretation. The analysis focused on identifying patterns related to instructional leadership, teacher collaboration, reflective practice, professional development support, and Islamic value-based school culture. To strengthen the credibility of the findings, the study applied source triangulation by comparing data from the principal and teachers, and technique triangulation by comparing interview, observation, and documentation data. Ethical considerations were maintained by informing participants about the purpose of the study, ensuring voluntary participation, preserving confidentiality, and presenting the findings responsibly for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Principal as an Instructional Leader in Developing a Shared Vision for Professional Learning

The findings show that the principal played an important role as an instructional leader in developing a shared vision for professional learning within the Islamic school. The principal viewed teacher professional development as a strategic need for improving the quality of teaching and learning. This vision was reflected in the principal's efforts to encourage teachers to participate in collaborative activities, discuss instructional problems, reflect on students' learning outcomes, and share teaching strategies with one another. In this context, the principal's leadership was not limited to administrative supervision but was directed toward

strengthening instructional quality and teacher learning (Muslim et al., 2025; Nasir et al., 2026; Yenita & Andriani, 2025).

Instructional leadership in this study appeared in the principal's ability to define learning improvement as a collective responsibility. The principal encouraged teachers to understand that professional development should not be carried out individually or occasionally, but through continuous collaboration. This finding is consistent with Liu and Hallinger (2018), who emphasize that principal instructional leadership is closely related to teacher self-efficacy and professional learning. When principals provide clear direction and support teacher learning, teachers are more likely to engage in activities that strengthen their instructional capacity.

The principal's instructional leadership was also reflected in the effort to connect professional learning communities with school improvement. Teacher collaboration was directed not only toward routine discussion but also toward improving classroom practices. Teachers were encouraged to examine learning problems, share successful strategies, and reflect on how students responded to different teaching methods. This finding aligns with Bellibaş et al. (2021), who show that instructional leadership contributes to instructional quality by shaping the conditions that support effective teaching. In the present study, the principal helped create these conditions by encouraging a school culture in which teachers were expected to learn together and improve their instructional practices.

Another important aspect of instructional leadership was the principal's role in building commitment among teachers. The principal sought to motivate teachers by emphasizing that professional learning communities are part of the school's collective effort to improve educational quality. This role is significant because PLCs require a shared commitment among teachers, not merely formal participation in meetings. Zheng et al. (2019) explain that instructional leadership can support the development of professional learning communities and teacher effectiveness when school leaders encourage shared goals, collaboration, and professional responsibility. The findings of this study support this view by showing that the principal's leadership helped strengthen teachers' awareness of the importance of collective learning.

The findings also indicate that the principal attempted to integrate instructional leadership with the Islamic identity of the school. Professional learning was not only understood as a means of improving teaching techniques, but also as a way to strengthen teachers' responsibility in educating students morally and spiritually. This is important in Islamic schools, where instructional improvement is inseparable from character formation and religious values. Dewi (2024) emphasizes that school leadership in Islamic educational settings plays an important role in building a religious school culture. In this study, the principal's vision for PLC development was connected to the broader mission of forming competent teachers who are also committed to Islamic educational values.

Thus, the principal's role as an instructional leader can be understood through three main practices: setting a shared direction for teacher learning, encouraging professional commitment, and linking instructional improvement with the Islamic mission of the school (Fiqri et al., 2025; Listyasari et al., 2026). These practices show that instructional leadership is essential for developing professional learning communities because it provides direction, meaning, and continuity for collaborative teacher learning. Without such leadership, PLC

activities may become procedural routines rather than meaningful professional learning processes.

Facilitating Teacher Collaboration and Reflective Practice

The second finding concerns the principal's role in facilitating teacher collaboration and reflective practice. The data show that the school developed professional learning communities through regular teacher discussions, reflection on teaching and learning processes, and sharing of classroom experiences. These activities became important spaces for teachers to discuss instructional challenges, exchange ideas, and learn from one another. The principal supported these activities by providing opportunities, time, and encouragement for teachers to engage in collaborative professional learning (Nguyen, 2023; Pashmforoosh et al., 2023; Ratnawati et al., 2025).

Teacher collaboration in this study was not limited to formal meetings. It also occurred through informal reflective conversations among teachers, especially when they discussed classroom problems, student learning difficulties, and teaching strategies. This indicates that PLCs can grow when collaboration becomes part of the daily culture of the school. Antinluoma et al. (2021) describe professional learning communities as school-based practices that emphasize collective responsibility, shared learning, and collaboration among teachers. The findings of this study reflect these characteristics because teachers were encouraged to participate in collective learning rather than work in isolation.

Reflective practice was another important element of PLC development. Teachers were encouraged to reflect on the learning process and student outcomes in order to identify what needed to be improved. Through reflection, teachers could evaluate their instructional methods, consider alternative strategies, and learn from their own experiences as well as from their colleagues. Alzayed and Alabdulkareem (2021) highlight that reflective practice within professional learning communities contributes to teachers' professional growth because it allows teachers to examine their teaching more critically and collaboratively. In the present study, reflection became a bridge between classroom experience and professional improvement.

The principal's role as a facilitator was crucial in sustaining collaboration and reflection. The principal provided structural support by allowing time for teacher meetings and encouraging teachers to participate actively in professional learning activities. This support helped create an environment in which teachers felt that collaboration was valued by school leadership. Mohd Zabidi et al. (2023) explain that the content of teacher collaboration in PLCs includes professional dialogue, shared practice, collective inquiry, and efforts to improve teaching. The findings of this study show that these elements appeared in the school's professional learning activities, although they still needed to be strengthened and organized more systematically.

Teacher collaboration also contributed to the development of trust and collegiality among teachers. When teachers shared their experiences and discussed instructional challenges, they became more open to receiving feedback and learning from others. This culture is important because effective PLCs require trust, mutual support, and willingness to engage in professional dialogue. De Jong et al. (2022) argue that teacher learning in collaborative contexts is shaped by the quality of interaction and professional dialogue among teachers. In this study, the principal's facilitative leadership helped strengthen interaction

among teachers and encouraged them to view collaboration as part of their professional responsibility.

In the Islamic school context, collaboration and reflection were also supported by Islamic values such as *shura* or deliberation, mutual advice, togetherness, and responsibility. These values strengthened the collaborative culture by encouraging teachers to discuss problems respectfully, support one another, and work together for the improvement of learning. Parjiman et al. (2023) show that Islamic values can be developed through school culture and can shape educational practices. In this study, Islamic values provided a moral foundation for teacher collaboration, making PLCs not only professional spaces but also value-based communities.

Overall, the findings indicate that the principal's facilitative role was central to the development of teacher collaboration and reflective practice. The principal supported PLCs by creating opportunities for discussion, encouraging reflective learning, motivating teachers to share instructional experiences, and strengthening a culture of mutual support. These findings suggest that PLC development in Islamic schools requires both instructional leadership and value-based collaboration. Teacher collaboration becomes more meaningful when it is supported by clear leadership direction, reflective practice, and Islamic values that promote respect, responsibility, and collective improvement.

Supporting Continuous Teacher Professional Development

The third finding shows that the principal supported continuous teacher professional development as an important part of developing professional learning communities. The principal understood that teacher professionalism could not be improved only through occasional training or administrative supervision. Instead, professional development needed to be embedded in daily school practices through collaboration, reflection, sharing of teaching experiences, and continuous learning among teachers. This indicates that PLCs functioned as a school-based mechanism for sustaining teacher professional growth (Stosich, 2020; Supendi et al., 2026; Trabona et al., 2019).

The principal's support for professional development was reflected in the provision of time, space, and encouragement for teachers to engage in learning activities. Teachers were encouraged to discuss learning problems, evaluate teaching strategies, and exchange good practices. These activities created opportunities for teachers to learn from their own classroom experiences and from the experiences of their colleagues. This finding is consistent with Trabona et al. (2019), who emphasize that collaborative professional learning can strengthen teacher capacity when teachers are given meaningful opportunities to learn together, reflect on practice, and connect professional learning with classroom improvement.

Teacher professional development in the school was also strengthened through reflective dialogue. Teachers were not only asked to attend meetings, but also encouraged to examine instructional practices and student learning outcomes. This reflective process helped teachers identify challenges in learning, consider alternative strategies, and develop more responsive teaching practices. Mouraz et al. (2023) show that peer observation and collaborative professional learning can contribute to teacher development by creating opportunities for feedback, reflection, and improvement. In the present study, although peer observation was not yet described as a fully formalized program, the practice of sharing

classroom experiences and discussing instructional challenges reflected the early formation of reflective professional learning.

The principal's role as a motivator was also important in sustaining teacher participation. The data indicate that the principal attempted to build teachers' confidence and commitment by being directly involved in professional learning activities. This involvement created a sense of moral support and strengthened teachers' trust in school leadership. Teacher participation in PLCs is often influenced by whether teachers feel that the activities are meaningful, supported, and relevant to their instructional needs. Therefore, the principal's motivational role helped prevent PLC activities from becoming merely formal or administrative routines.

Continuous professional development also requires a culture that supports teacher agency. In this study, teachers were not positioned only as recipients of instruction from the principal. They were encouraged to contribute ideas, share classroom experiences, and participate in collective reflection. This finding is relevant to De Jong et al. (2022), who argue that collaborative teacher learning is shaped by professional interaction, dialogue, and shared responsibility. When teachers are given space to participate actively, PLCs can become a more meaningful platform for professional growth.

However, the findings also suggest that PLC development still needs stronger institutional organization. Although teacher collaboration and reflection had been practiced, these activities need to be made more systematic through clear schedules, focused discussion themes, documentation of teacher learning outcomes, and follow-up actions for classroom improvement. Without systematic organization, PLC activities may depend too much on informal initiative and may not produce sustained instructional improvement. Therefore, the principal's instructional leadership is needed not only to motivate teachers but also to institutionalize PLCs as part of the school's professional development system.

Overall, the principal's support for continuous teacher professional development shows that PLCs can become an effective strategy for improving teacher professionalism when they are supported by leadership, collaboration, reflection, and institutional commitment. In the Islamic school studied, professional development was not understood only as technical improvement in teaching, but also as part of teachers' responsibility to provide better education for students. This demonstrates that instructional leadership can strengthen PLCs by connecting professional learning with the broader mission of school improvement.

Integrating Islamic Values into Professional Learning Communities

The fourth finding concerns the integration of Islamic values into the development of professional learning communities. The data show that PLC activities in the school were not only directed toward improving pedagogical competence, but also toward strengthening Islamic values in teacher collaboration and school culture. The principal emphasized values such as deliberation, togetherness, mutual advice, responsibility, and respect in professional interactions among teachers (M. Munif, 2026; Naomira & Hemawati, 2026; Ratnawati et al., 2025). These values shaped the way teachers communicated, discussed learning problems, and supported one another in professional learning activities.

The value of *shura* or deliberation was reflected in the collaborative decision-making process among teachers. In PLC activities, teachers were encouraged to discuss instructional

problems collectively rather than solving them individually. This practice created a more participatory professional culture in which teachers could share ideas, express concerns, and contribute to learning improvement. In the context of Islamic schools, *shura* strengthens PLCs because it provides a moral basis for professional dialogue, mutual respect, and collective responsibility.

The value of mutual advice also played an important role in teacher collaboration. Teachers were encouraged to remind and support one another in improving teaching practices and maintaining professional commitment. This value helped create a collegial atmosphere in which feedback was not understood as criticism, but as part of shared responsibility for improving education. This is important because effective PLCs require trust and openness among teachers. Without trust, teachers may be reluctant to share classroom difficulties or receive suggestions from colleagues.

Islamic values also strengthened the moral purpose of PLCs. Teacher collaboration was not only aimed at improving instructional techniques, but also at supporting student character formation and strengthening the religious culture of the school. Dewi (2024) emphasizes that principal management plays an important role in building religious school culture based on Islamic values. In this study, the principal connected professional learning with the school's Islamic mission by encouraging teachers to integrate values into classroom practice and professional interaction.

The findings further indicate that PLCs in Islamic schools can function as value-based professional communities. This means that teachers learn together not only to improve teaching quality, but also to strengthen their ethical responsibility as educators. Parjiman et al. (2023) show that Islamic values can be developed through school culture and can influence educational practices. In the present study, values such as togetherness, responsibility, and mutual respect became cultural foundations that supported the sustainability of PLC activities.

The integration of Islamic values into PLCs also distinguishes professional learning communities in Islamic schools from PLCs in more general school contexts. While PLCs generally emphasize shared vision, collaboration, reflective inquiry, and continuous improvement, PLCs in Islamic schools may add a moral-spiritual dimension to these elements. Teacher collaboration becomes meaningful not only because it improves instructional quality, but also because it reflects Islamic values of brotherhood, responsibility, and collective goodness. This value-based dimension strengthens the identity of the Islamic school and helps ensure that professional development remains connected to the school's religious mission.

Overall, the findings show that Islamic values provided an important cultural and ethical foundation for PLC development. The principal's instructional leadership helped connect teacher collaboration with the moral values of the school, making PLCs both professional and value-based. This suggests that the development of PLCs in Islamic schools requires more than technical organization; it also requires a school culture rooted in Islamic values that encourages teachers to learn, reflect, collaborate, and improve together.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that instructional leadership plays an important role in the development of professional learning communities in Islamic schools. The principal's role was reflected in setting a shared direction for teacher professional learning, encouraging

collaboration, facilitating reflective practice, and supporting continuous professional development. The findings indicate that the principal did not function merely as an administrative leader, but also as an instructional leader who created conditions for teachers to learn together, discuss instructional problems, share teaching practices, and improve the quality of learning.

The development of professional learning communities in the school was supported through regular teacher discussions, reflective dialogue, sharing of classroom experiences, and school-based professional development activities. These practices helped strengthen teacher collaboration, collegiality, and collective responsibility for instructional improvement. In addition, Islamic values such as *shura*, togetherness, mutual advice, responsibility, and respect provided an ethical and cultural foundation for PLC development. Thus, professional learning communities in Islamic schools can be understood not only as professional spaces for improving teaching quality, but also as value-based communities that support the moral and religious mission of Islamic education.

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single Islamic elementary school, so the findings cannot be generalized to all Islamic schools or madrasah contexts. Second, the study used a qualitative case study design, which provides an in-depth understanding but does not measure the statistical relationship between instructional leadership, teacher collaboration, PLC effectiveness, and instructional quality. Third, the data were obtained from interviews, observations, and documents within a limited fieldwork period. Future research is recommended to involve multiple Islamic schools, apply comparative or mixed-method designs, and examine more specifically how instructional leadership influences the sustainability of PLCs, teacher professional development, school culture, and student learning outcomes.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used ChatGPT as an AI-assisted writing tool to support sentence refinement, readability improvement, and textual coherence. All AI-generated suggestions were carefully examined and revised by the author(s), who take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the final manuscript.

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