



الجامعة الإسلامية بالمدينة المنورة  
ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF MADINAH

# مجلة الجامعة الإسلامية للعلوم التربوية والاجتماعية

مجلة علمية دورية محكمة

تصدر أربع مرات في العام خلال الأشهر:

(مارس، يونيو، سبتمبر، ديسمبر)

العدد 19 - المجلد 35

ربيع الأول 1446 هـ - سبتمبر 2024 م

## معلومات الإيداع في مكتبة الملك فهد الوطنية

### النسخة الورقية :

رقم الإيداع: 1441/7131

تاريخ الإيداع: 1441/06/18

رقم ردمد : 1658-8509

### النسخة الإلكترونية :

رقم الإيداع: 1441/7129

تاريخ الإيداع: 1441/06/18

رقم ردمد : 1658-8495

### الموقع الإلكتروني للمجلة :

<https://journals.iu.edu.sa/ESS>



### البريد الإلكتروني للمجلة :

ترسل البحوث باسم رئيس تحرير المجلة

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\* ترتيب الأبحاث حسب تاريخ ورودها للمجلة مع مراعاة تنوع التخصصات



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**Saudi Arabia's Islamic Education  
Teachers' Perspectives on Quality  
Professional Development Activities**

**وجهات نظر معلمي الدراسات الإسلامية في  
المملكة العربية السعودية حول جودة أنشطة  
التطوير المهني**

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**DOI:10.36046/2162-000-019-008**

## المستخلص

في حين أن الدراسات الإسلامية تحتل مكانة بارزة في المناهج الدراسية في المملكة العربية السعودية، إلا أن أنشطة التطوير المهني لمُعلميها لم تُدرس بشكل كافٍ. هدفت هذه الدراسة البحثية ذات الأسلوب المختلط إلى استكشاف الأنشطة التي يمارسها معلمو الدراسات الإسلامية في المملكة العربية السعودية للمساهمة في تطويرهم المهني. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، سعت الدراسة إلى تحديد الإجراءات التي يعتقد هؤلاء المعلمون أنه ينبغي اتخاذها لتطوير حياتهم المهنية. تم إجراء استبانات كمية على عينة مكونة من ٢٤٦ معلمًا ومعلمة، في حين تم إجراء مقابلات نوعية مع ٨٢ مشاركًا آخرين فيما يتعلق بمهذنين المجالين. ووفقاً لنتائج الاستبانة، فإن الخبرة التدريسية، والموضوعات التي يتم تدريسها، والأفكار حول القضايا والتحديات التي يواجهونها هي العوامل التي ساهمت بشكل كبير في التطوير المهني للمعلمين. وفيما يتعلق بالخطوات الموصى بها، اقترحت المقابلات إدراج برامج التدريب وورش العمل والزيارات بين المعلمين وتبادل الخبرات باعتبارها قابلة للتنفيذ وفعالة. قدمت هذه الدراسة مساهمة كبيرة في التطوير المهني لمعلمي الدراسات الإسلامية من خلال تحديد العوامل المؤثرة، مثل الخبرة التعليمية، واقتراح خطوات قابلة للتنفيذ، بما في ذلك البرامج التدريبية وورش العمل والزيارات بين المعلمين وتبادل الخبرات.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التطوير المهني؛ معلمو الدراسات الإسلامية؛ التربويون.

## Abstract

While Islamic Education (IE) occupies a prominent position in the curriculum of Saudi Arabia, the professional development activities of its teachers have been understudied. This mixed-methods research study aimed to explore the activities that Saudi Arabia's IE teachers consider contributing to their professional development. Additionally, the study sought to identify the actions that these teachers believe should be taken to develop their careers professionally. Quantitative questionnaires were administered to a sample of 246 teachers for the first study area, while qualitative interviews were held with another 82 participants for the second study area. According to the questionnaire results, teaching experience in the classroom, subjects taught and reflections on issues and challenges faced are the factors that contributed most to teachers' professional development. Regarding the recommended steps, the interviews suggested the inclusion of training programmes, workshops, teacher-to-teacher visits and sharing of experiences as actionable and effective. The study made a significant contribution to the professional development of Islamic Education teachers by identifying influential factors, such as teaching experience, and suggesting actionable steps, including training programmers, workshops, teacher-to-teacher visits and sharing of experiences.

**Keywords:** Professional development; Islamic Education teachers; educators.

## 1. Introduction.

Islamic education (IE) is an important field in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where the majority of the population is Muslim, and the education system is informed by the Islamic tarbiyah. The main religious subjects taught in Saudi schools are Qur'an, Tawheed (declaration of the oneness of God), Tajweed (recitation), Tafseer (interpretation), and Hadith (teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad). Teachers in the Kingdom play a crucial role because they are not only responsible for planning and implementing the educational teaching plan as per the Islamic Education guideline for schools, they also play a crucial role in shaping the religious and moral development of students (Alotaibi, 2014; Marghalani, 2018). Therefore, while Islamic education (IE) teachers play a significant role in shaping students' religious beliefs and values, they, like all other educators, must also meet the curriculum objectives of their subjects (Marghalani, 2018). IE teachers need to incorporate innovative approaches into their teaching, emphasizing the essential requirement for professional development activities.

Professional development is the process of strengthening skills, competencies, and knowledge in each field or subfield to advance one's career and improve teaching practice. According to Day (1999), continuing professional development is a concept that encompasses all the natural learning experiences and deliberate and organised activities that aim to directly or indirectly benefit individuals, groups, or educational institutions. These efforts contribute to the overall quality of education within the classroom. It is a dynamic process in which teachers, individually and collaboratively, review, renew and extend their dedication as agents of change, driven by the moral purpose of teaching. Borg (2015) describes good academic professional development as a requirement for establishing a strong relationship between teachers and students. It engages teachers in decision-making, supports collaboration, encourages exploratory and reflective thinking and incorporates supportive elements such as the involvement of experienced teachers. By centralizing the value of teachers' knowledge and experience, this kind of professional development aims to enhance the overall educational process.

Professional development activities are essential for Islamic Studies teachers to improve their competencies and enhance their teaching skills. The professional development of teachers in educational institutions should aim to equip IE teachers with the requisite knowledge, teaching expertise and competence (Alhashmi and Moussa-Inaty, 2021). The education environment today demands religious course

teachers who possess an updated understanding of effective learning and teaching methods, have strong content knowledge and can make connections between the curriculum and real-life experiences. Teachers continually gain insight into improving their practice by collaborating to enhance student learning. Professional development essentially helps teachers keep up with new research and practice developments that are in line with their goals (Fischer et al., 2020). However, extra effort is needed to ensure that these teachers have access to workshops and materials besides transitional learning.

### **Problem statement.**

It is crucial to ensure that IE teachers access quality professional development opportunities that can help them stay up-to-date with the latest teaching methods, technologies and pedagogies. However, based on the search conducted by this study, there are no studies conducted in Saudi Arabia that explore what IE teachers consider influencing their professional development. In addition, there are no studies that explore these teachers' perceptions of what steps should be taken to professionally develop IE teachers.

### **Study purpose.**

In that regard, this study aimed to fill these gaps by exploring the perceptions of Saudi Arabia's IE teachers about the factors that influence the quality of professional development. In addition, it explores their perspective regarding the actions that should be taken to develop them professionally. The findings of this study can provide valuable insights into the current state of professional development activities for IE teachers in Saudi Arabia and can inform the development of policies aimed at improving these activities.

## **2. Research questions.**

**2.1. What factors do Saudi Arabia's IE teachers think influenced their quality professional development?**

**2.1. What actions should be taken to professionally develop IE teachers in Saudi Arabia from teachers' perspective?**

### 3. Literature.

When discussing professional development opportunities, many scholars use different descriptions for what can be considered high-quality professional development activities. These activities include workshops, formal training, professional training, training sessions, lectures, seminars and preparatory programmes (Pina, 2019; Wright, 2019; Casale, 2011; Wie et al., 2009). According to Pina (2019), 'traditional' professional development activities include face-to-face training, workshops, or summer sessions on school premises or in other locations during the school year, school day and summer (p. 18). One common characteristic of this type of professional development is that it is based on presentations where trainees sit and listen.

Birzer (2004) suggests that traditional professional development is a suitable way to encourage cognitive learning which is consistent and methodical, relying on 'exposure to logically presented information' (p. 395). Moreover, Guskey and Yoon (2009) synthesise, from a few studies that provided credible evidence of the impact of professional development on learning performance, that some of the best practices included workshops that are based on informed instructional practices and involved active experience. These workshops not only provide educators with the necessary knowledge and professional skills, but they also provide or promote forums for active learning, collaborative problem-solving and reflection. Teachers are more likely to apply what they have learned in their classrooms by engaging in active experiences, leading to improved instructional practices and enhanced student learning outcomes.

However, as Pina (2019) and Casale (2011) indicate, two major shortcomings of this form of professional development include professional development topics for teachers that might not consider their needs and the lack of ongoing mentoring and support. Casale (2011) recommends that the teachers choose the topics so the workshops can be more effective, and Pina (2019) notes that professional development should be relevant and meaningful. Most importantly, Casale (2011) suggests raising the teachers' awareness of nontraditional methods of professional development. To gain an understanding of nontraditional methods, the definitions and forms of professional development are discussed in the following section.

### 3.1. What is professional development?

Ganser (2000) argues that professional development could occur through official experiences like seminars, conferences, meetings and mentoring, as well as from informal experiences like following publications in the field, participating in groups, or watching visual materials. Moreover, besides workshops based on informed instructional practices, Guskey and Yoon (2009) note that some of the best practices also include outside experts who would choose practices based on the results instead of whether they are comfortable with them or not, as well as time devoted to helping trainees to deeply understand the suggested practices and reflect on how best to implement them.

Furthermore, Richards and Farrell (2005) developed a professional development framework based on self-monitoring, teaching portfolios, peer coaching, team teaching, support groups, journal writing, classroom observations, case analysis and action research. According to the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey, there are nine forms of professional development activities (Rutkoswski et al., 2013). They include courses or workshops, conferences or seminars, qualification programmes, observing classes in other schools, joining a network of teachers, individual or collaborative research and mentoring and or peer observation and coaching. These diverse approaches offer educators numerous avenues to enhance their professional growth and continually improve their teaching practices.

Finally, Saberi and Sahargard (2019) identify around twenty items as suggested factors for teachers' professional development. The factors include almost all of the items suggested by the previously mentioned definitions and explanations of professional development—traditional and untraditional, formal and informal. These items include BA courses, MA courses, teaching experience, training programmes, reflection, observers' feedback, colleagues' assist, journal research, workshops and conferences, experience as a learner, institutional tips, teaching materials, learners' feedback, the teacher's book, peer coaching, self-critical evaluation, classroom observation, learner's attitudes and the nature and scope of learning activities. Although Saberi and Sahargard's survey was designed for language teachers, it can still be used as a tool to collect data from teachers of other subjects, including Islamic teachers in Saudi Arabia.

Based on the studies above, professional development can be summarised as a collaborative, long-term and content-driven process aimed at improving instruction delivery in the classroom. For instance, according to Guskey and Yoon (2009),



professional development encompasses both natural learning experiences and deliberate activities that benefit individuals, groups, or educational institutions . It involves teachers reviewing, renewing and extending their dedication as agents of change, driven by the moral purpose of teaching. Borg (2015) state that good professional development establishes strong relationships between teachers and students, encourages decision-making, collaboration, exploratory thinking and reflection, and incorporates the expertise of experienced teachers. It can take various forms, including seminars, conferences, mentoring, publications, group participation and workshops focused on informed instructional practices (Ganser, 2000; Richard & Farell 2005). Professional development frameworks may also involve self-monitoring, teaching portfolios, peer coaching, team teaching, support groups, journal writing, classroom observations, case analysis and action research.

### **3.2. Studies on professional development in Islamic educators.**

Professional development for Islamic education (IE) teachers capitalises on the principle of lifelong learning within the Islamic context, providing a promising pathway for their effective growth to meet the increasing need for highly skilled IE teachers. In the Islamic community, the pursuit of personal growth is considered a lifelong and sacred duty (Alhashmi & Moussa-Inaty, 2021). The pursuit of enhanced wisdom, knowledge and skills is also regarded as a Muslim's mandatory duty, as is indicated in a prophetic declaration that 'seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim' (Ibn-Majah, The Book of the Sunnah, Hadith No. 244). By embracing professional development opportunities, IE teachers align themselves with this duty, enhancing their wisdom, knowledge and skills to serve their communities and fulfill their Islamic obligations.

### **3.3. Challenges in teaching Islamic studies.**

The current methodologies of teaching and learning Islamic studies are failing to keep up with the progress of the modern world. As Maroun et al. (2008) explain, today's generation of learners is experiencing the digital revolution and the spread of technological applications. The disconnect between this revolution and current teaching methods, which are essentially teacher-centred, has led not only to the ineffectiveness of enhancing the students' understanding of religious principles but also to the development of a negative attitude towards Islamic studies (Ashaari et al., 2012). One reason why most Islamic studies teachers are disconnected from modern teaching methods is because in college their studies largely focus on the theoretical

and they do not receive the necessary training to apply effective teaching methods. Consequently, Islamic studies teachers face challenges in adapting their instruction to the demands of the digital age, hindering the fulfillment of students' educational needs and potential.

When it comes to methods of teaching Islamic subjects in Saudi Arabia, Alotaibi (2014) states that preaching, lecturing, role modelling, the narrative method, the iterative method, indoctrination, teaching by practice and recitation are the most common teaching methods used in religious courses. Such methods might not necessarily follow the progressive pedagogical approaches that are student-centered, engaging, technology inclusive and foster important skills like critical thinking. Although teachers' prior perceptions can change through professional development programmes, such programmes are not always the best solution (Tarman, 2012). Alwadai (2014) states that pre-service preparation and in-service professional development programmes in Saudi Arabia in fact serve as obstacles to improving skills like critical thinking. At the same time, as mentioned above, formal training is not the only form of professional development.

Another challenge is a lack of supervision over current Islamic studies teachers in public schools in Saudi Arabia. As Shakuna et al. (2016) note, one essential aim of educational supervision is to help teachers to enhance their performance. However, since this is lacking, the poor performance of Islamic studies teachers has prevailed (Aseery, 2020). This negatively affects the quality of education in the field of Islamic studies and limits the potential for growth and development among teachers (Aseery, 2023). Addressing this situation requires the establishment of robust and comprehensive supervision systems that provide continuing support, feedback and professional development opportunities for IE teachers. These measures can enhance their teaching capabilities as well as contribute to the overall improvement of Islamic studies in Saudi Arabian public schools.

According to a study on the certification of teachers of Islamic education by Bakhtiyarova et al. (2020), the biggest challenge for teachers is a lack of competence in three major but relevant areas. First, teachers lack competence in the field of teaching Islamic disciplines. Second, teachers lack competence in the design and implementation of the pedagogical process for Islamic disciplines. Third, teachers lack competence in the development of methodological support for the teaching process. Competence of pedagogy is defined as these teachers' ability to manage students' learning, which includes understanding the framework. Addressing these

areas of competence is crucial for empowering IE teachers to provide high-quality education in line with the requirements of their profession (Yusoff et al., 2018). To address these challenges and enhance teachers' competence, it is imperative to prioritise tailored professional development programmes that address the specific needs of IE teachers.

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that professional development involves numerous planned activities, including workshops, seminars, training, mentoring and publications among others. The literature also demonstrates that professional development is a sacred duty in Islam but teachers face challenges, including a lack of competence in teaching Islamic disciplines, designing and implementing pedagogical processes and developing methodological support for the teaching process.

#### **4. Methodology.**

A mixed-methods research design, combining descriptive quantitative research and descriptive qualitative research, was adopted to explore the perception of Saudi Arabia's IE teachers regarding the professional development activities that were effective in their careers and the actions that should be taken to develop them professionally.

##### **4.1. Samples and Participants.**

A convenience sampling strategy was used to recruit participants to the study. The researcher particularly used two participant recruitment methods to create the sample for this study: personal contacts with known IE educators and the snowball sampling method. In the first part, the researcher approached known IE educators from personal contacts and requested the to participate in the study. After these participants were recruited, snowball sampling strategy was used; where the initially contacted IE teachers referred their colleagues who were also willing to take part in the study. Using this approach, 246 Saudi Arabian practicing male and female IE teachers were selected to take part in this study. All 246 participant answered the quantitative questionnaires while a subsection of the 246 were contacted to provide more answers for the qualitative interview.

To address any ethical issues arising from the use of human subjects in the study, the approval of King Saud University's institutional review board was sought. Approval from the IRB helps address ethical issues related to research involving human participants by ensuring their rights, welfare and privacy are protected. The

researcher then obtained informed consent from the respondents before confirming their eligibility of participating in the study. No material rewards were promised nor was coercion used to recruit participants into the study.

#### 4.2. Data collection tool and procedure.

Research questionnaires and interviews were the two main data collection methods used in the study.

Educators' perceptions regarding the professional development activities that were effective were measured quantitatively (See Table 1 for the quantitative data collection tool). Questionnaires were used for the first research question and completed by 246 participants. The questionnaire was mainly quantitative and involved 13 responses to the following question: To what extent did the following factors influence your professional development? Table 1 below provides the full list of the 13 items and the 3-point Likert scale used. (1-3)

Table 1. Items on factors influencing professional development

No.	Item	Major effect (1)	Some effect (2)	No effect at all (3)
1	Courses I took at the undergraduate level			
2	My teaching experience in the classroom			
3	My own reflections on the issues and challenges I faced in class			
4	In-service training programmes			
5	Observers' and moderators' notes			
6	School management notes (principle)			
7	Visits between teachers			
8	Verification of relevant research results in scientific journals			
9	Attending workshops and conferences			
10	Teaching guidelines, rules and regulations			
11	The subjects and textbooks I have taught			
12	Learners' notes			
13	Teachers' book			

While questionnaires were used for the first quantitative research question, interviews were used for the second qualitative research question; educators' perceptions of actions that should be taken. The interviews were conducted with 82 participants who were selected based on their responses to the questionnaires. A semi-structured one-to-one interviewing method for collecting data was utilised to enable an in-depth exploration of the recommended actions by each participant about the professional development of IE teachers. The semi-structured, open format

helped to probe participants' responses and directed the conversation naturally to acquire a full picture of the participants' descriptions of their recommended actions. Moreover, the format was essential in directing attention to the elements of the participants' recommendations that were particularly interesting for this research. The opening question of the interview was: what actions should be taken to professionally develop IE teachers in Saudi Arabia?

#### **4.3. Data analysis.**

Different approaches were used in the data analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered via the questionnaires and interviews respectively. For the quantitative data, descriptive statistics were used to determine the factors that participants believed affected their development the most. For the qualitative data, content analysis was used to make valid inferences from texts to the context. Content analysis involves systematically categorizing and analyzing the content of responses to identify common themes or factors (Selvi, 2019). First, a thorough review of interview transcripts was conducted to acquire a general impression of every participant's response. During this process, notes were recorded to denote emerging patterns and recurring elements identified in the participants' accounts of their proposed actions to enhance religious teaching. Hence, the notes were useful in the identification of codes, potential themes and meaning units.

#### **4.4. Validity and reliability.**

Several measures were taken to ensure the validity and reliability of the quantitative data collected via the questionnaires. Two steps were taken to establish the validity and reliability of the questionnaire developed to assess the influence of professional development activities among IE teachers in Saudi Arabia. Content validity of the instrument was ensured by first basing the items on the results of the literature review on various professional development activities, and then consulting two university professors at King Saud University on the relevance of the items to Islamic religion education. Based on their feedback, the questionnaire was adapted to adequately cover the influential professional development activities. Next, face validity of the instrument was assessed by pilot-testing it among a small group of educators. Their feedback was incorporated to refine the items. By employing these methods, the questionnaire's content and face validity were established, ensuring it effectively measures the influence of professional development activities on the careers of IE teachers in Saudi Arabia.

Conversely, several steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected through the short semi-structured interviews. First, the opening interview question was piloted-tested among educators to ensure clarity and relevance. The follow-up questions were open-ended, allowing participants to provide detailed and varied responses. Important, the short interviews were conducted following a standardised protocol to ensure dependability of the questioning approach across participants. The researcher maintained a neutral position throughout all the interviews to minimise any potential influence on participants' responses. Second, participant review of responses was employed, allowing participants to reread and confirm their interview responses for accuracy.

## 5. Results.

A total of 246 teachers responded to the questionnaires. Table 2 reveals that there were more male compared to female educators. Most of the respondents had bachelor's degrees and more than 10 years of experience.

Table 2. Demographic data of the participants

Variable	Group	N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	175	71.1
	Female	71	28.9
Degree level	Bachelor's	204	82.9
	(Master's-PhD)	42	17.1
Years of experience	Less than five years	30	12.2
	Five to ten years	53	21.5
	More than ten years	163	66.3

### 5.1. What of the following factors influenced your professional development?

Participants were asked to respond on the factors that influenced their professional development using 13 items. As mentioned earlier, these 13 factors were rated on a 3-point Likert scale with the three options being: "major effect", "some effect" and "no effect at all" on their professional development. The results of the survey suggest that "My teaching experience in the classroom" received the highest mean score of 2.78, indicating that it had the biggest effect on the professional development of the respondents. Teaching experience is one of the 20 items identified by Saberi and Sahargard (2019) as a significant factor influencing

teachers' professional development. This finding aligns with existing literature, emphasizing the central role of practical, hands-on teaching experiences in shaping educators' skills, pedagogical approaches, and overall professional growth (Borg, 2015; Day, 1999). The recognition of teaching experience as a pivotal factor underscores the importance of providing opportunities for educators to engage in meaningful classroom practices as a key strategy for fostering their continuous development. As such, these results contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on effective strategies for enhancing teacher professional development.

Similarly, "The subjects and textbooks I have taught" and "My own reflections on the issues and challenges I faced in class" were also rated quite high with mean scores of 2.67 and 2.48, respectively. These findings underscore the significance of subject matter expertise and reflective practices in the professional development of teachers. The emphasis on subjects and textbooks highlights the importance of content knowledge and pedagogical approaches specific to the curriculum, while the recognition of personal reflections emphasizes the role of metacognition and self-awareness in addressing challenges within the classroom setting (Alhashmi and Moussa-Inaty, 2021). The elevated mean scores for these items align with the notion that a teacher's deep understanding of the subjects they teach, coupled with a reflective stance toward their teaching experiences, contributes substantially to their ongoing professional growth (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Saberi & Sahardard, 2019). This resonates with the broader literature on effective teaching practices, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of factors that shape teachers' development and proficiency in their roles.

However, factors like "Verification of relevant research results in scientific journals" and "Teacher's book" received lower mean scores, suggesting that they had a lesser influence on professional development. The lower ratings for these items indicate that, in the perception of the surveyed teachers, consulting scientific journals for research results and relying on teacher's books were not as impactful in contributing to their professional growth. These findings prompt a reflection on the diverse sources and methods that educators consider valuable in their professional development. The lower mean scores might be indicative of a need to reassess the effectiveness and relevance of these particular resources within the context of teacher development. This highlights the importance of acknowledging the varied preferences and needs of teachers when designing professional development initiatives, ensuring a tailored approach that aligns with the factors perceived by

educators as most conducive to their continuous improvement (See Appendix for a complete table of the descriptive statistics).

## 5.2. What actions should be taken to develop IE teachers?

Responses to the qualitative question were grouped based on the similarity of the wording used. After the respondents had provided their answers, the answers were grouped based on similarity. For instance, five participants gave similar responses that suggested an 'intensification of training courses.' However, one of them specifically used the word 'programme' rather than 'course.' As explained in the data analysis section, a thorough review of the interview transcripts was conducted to acquire a general impression of every participant's response. The same section also highlights that notes were recorded to denote emerging patterns.

### Training.

The largest percentage of respondents proposed 'training' in different areas but phrased their suggestions differently. While some recommended training new teachers, others suggested continuing the training of experienced educators. Overall, they suggest that IE policymakers should place a significant emphasis on formal training programmes to enhance their professional development.

### Workshops.

The suggestion to use workshops was offered by a relatively high number of participants. Essentially, they all meant the same thing, the only difference being that a few respondents explained how the workshops would work. These were referred to as 'research workshops,' 'training workshops,' 'holding workshops,' 'attending workshops' or 'group workshops'.

### Visits.

Visiting was a common suggestion in the responses and appeared in the following ways. Most of the teachers framed this action as 'exchange visits'; other words used in the place of 'exchange' were 'reciprocal,' 'mutual,' 'field educational,' 'meaningful,' 'technical' or 'supervisor.' All these visits referred to teacher-to-teacher visits (to support and develop each other's skills) except for 'supervisor visits,' which referred to visits between teachers and their supervisors for skills development.



### **Experiences.**

A substantial number of participants suggested 'exchange experiences' and only one used the most appropriate phrase, which is 'share experiences.' The idea was that teachers should share their experiences during training, visits and workshops to develop knowledge of new teaching practices and demands.

### **Other proposed actions.**

A very large number of participants offered unique and independent proposals. However, some were either shallow or the idea was not fathomable. For instance, one participant suggested writing a book that would 'enrich each curriculum' to help the teacher to prepare and present each lesson, with 'the materials of the book...taken from the experiences of the experienced teachers.' A different respondent had a similar idea of issuing a yearly book 'with several development mechanisms, models and suggestions, with an indication of the names of the distinguished educators' departments in the field of Islamic education.' Another recommendation was the provision of incentives in the form of increased salary or awards, or a reduction of working hours (Fauzan, 2017). One participant emphatically stated that 'teachers did not need development but more motivation, activation and attraction to love their job.'

Several proposals were deeply religious and depicted religious education teachers are people ordained by God. For instance, one individual asserted that the roles of these teachers in education and development are godly and that they have received God's honour and reward by learning Sharia sciences. As such, the proposal is that they ought to make every effort to deliver a great message. Moreover, others considered the act of raising awareness in people's lives, religion and Islamic education as a godly calling. In addition, religious study teachers were advised to help students memorise the holy Quran as well as most of the Messenger's hadiths to receive God's blessing and peace.

Participants suggested teacher-to-teacher interaction in the form of classroom visits and conversations in formal meetings. Some participants confirmed that they benefited from visiting classes and schools in which they had not taught before (Soules, 2019). Nonetheless, most respondents said teachers lacked opportunities to observe their colleagues' teaching due to scheduling conflicts and time constraints. They therefore frequently interacted in weekly meetings and during prep time instead. During their interactions, they reported discussing teaching

techniques and the development of lesson plans and assessment worksheets (Pina, 2019). Other respondents suggested that teachers should have conversations and discussions on Islamic education professional development on social media. Many Islamic education teachers among the respondents indicated that they discussed professional development with their colleagues in Western countries. Through these discussions, they noted that they honed such skills as developing teaching strategies, lesson planning, classroom management and differentiation.

A large number of participants proposed a teaching approach that evolves through implementation, modelling, coaching and giving feedback. Participants emphasised the need for the coordinator to take responsibility for delivering sessions to teachers in schools during the 'professional development week.' Several participants had contrary opinions regarding this strategy, however. All participants expressed a positive perception of teacher training programmes but suggested the need for additional action. The respondents also proposed that IE teachers should be trained on the subjects of empowerment and autonomy.

## 6. Discussion.

The results of this study suggest that most teachers rely on their own teaching experience in the classroom and the subjects and textbooks they have taught for professional development. Essentially, the opportunities for professional development offered to IE teachers were found to be typically limited since they were misaligned with the teachers' needs, provided generic information, were compulsory and contained a strong structure (Pina, 2019). Both the literature review and the findings in this paper suggest that the investment in efficient IE pedagogy growth infrastructure is still insufficient and does not parallel the main investment sanctioned for Saudi Arabia's Islamic education curriculum (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). These deductions are in line with the traditional trends of IE worldwide, where curriculum development projects are emphasised more than instructors' professional learning opportunities. Moreover, the findings suggest that Islamic education resonates with the inference of Ahmed and Matthes (2017) on the necessity of consulting Saudi Arabia's IE teachers to develop accessible, practical and relevant development programmes before their delivery.

From the responses, the participating teachers' focus on learner-centred development opportunities and their desire for autonomy is backed by the self-determination theory. Notably, the theory states that three natural psychological needs promote inherent self-motivation: autonomy, competence and relatedness.

Lacheem (2017) suggests that effective jurisdictions of professional education programmes can encourage students to empower the halaqah structure. They are also able to facilitate curriculum development actions and form communities of enquiry. Most importantly, teacher empowerment enhances the teachers' effect on the learner and is accordant with the main features of ta'līm (Finn et al., 2010). The primary function of institutional leadership ought to be reoriented to undertake the performance of the collaborative duty of energising, promoting and facilitating Islamic education.

In this study, it is evident that the factors influencing the teachers' interest and professional learning practice were largely reactive to students' learning modes, technological advancements, and present-day improvements in the education field. The teachers were determined to alter the stereotypical image of Islamic education classes being depicted as boring (Jamjoom, 2010). Furthermore, the research results illustrate that the best quality professional development takes place when teachers and experts are connected to discuss, learn and explore matters relevant to daily classroom management.

With many teachers citing 'exchange experiences' as one of the actions that should be taken, the results indicate that teachers ought to be introduced to dialogue theory to study the benefits and shortcomings of implementing civil dialogue in class, especially regarding contentious matters. The theory also teaches how to create study environments that enhance dialogue and the exploration of many positions. As such, interactive activities and practical skills should be explored to help teachers introduce dialogue skills to students and ultimately motivate those taking part to become civil dialogue facilitators and trainers themselves (Everington, 2009). Furthermore, the outcomes also suggest that teachers and supervisors should be introduced to experience-sharing groups. Teachers are required to ensure that students have a clear comprehension of their legal and religious rights. Therefore, when leaving religious education training institutions, teachers ought to possess practical guidelines and knowledge outlining how to tackle religious literacy and liberty issues in the classroom both constitutionally and academically. For this purpose, Finn et al. (2010) suggest that teachers and administrators in schools with religious courses need to trace the history of their schools as they relate to Saudi law while exploring real-life scenarios related to religious freedom.

The responses in this study also illustrate that educators who interact with students daily should have good physical and spiritual health. Teachers' cognitive

health also determines their attitude towards their profession and students. In addition, teachers' pedagogical competence essentially aids in mannerism development and the organisation of learning processes (Fischer et al., 2020). Managing religious studies and learning processes requires proper planning and character development. For that reason, effective religious teachers act as moral agents both for their students and for their larger social surroundings (Borg, 2015). As suggested in the findings, religious teachers should teach students how to develop and expand their moral imagination and moral reasoning skills (Jamjoom, 2010). Therefore, the primary emphasis in professional religious education ought to be on the development of teachers' responsibility as role models for the students and society. Participants' proposals regarding the use of books also support the assertion that stories and narratives are an effective pedagogical strategy for cultivating students' moral imagination (Everington, 2009). Educators' portfolio development focused on ethics and morality is portrayed as an engaging activity that helps them continue learning with dignity. In other words, professional development can encompass numerous moral and ethics-related actions.

## 7. Recommendations.

IE policymakers should prioritise the enhancement of professional development for Islamic education teachers based on the findings of the study. They should recognise the importance of teaching experience and create opportunities for educators to gain practical classroom exposure. Emphasizing formal training programmes, organizing workshops and facilitating teacher-to-teacher visits can further support teachers' professional growth. Encouraging the sharing of experiences and fostering teacher-to-teacher interactions through classroom visits, formal meetings and social media platforms can promote knowledge exchange and the development of effective teaching strategies. Additionally, policymakers should consider unique proposals such as curriculum-enriching books and incentives like increased salaries or reduced working hours. Recognizing the religious dimension of Islamic education, supporting initiatives aligned with religious teachings and promoting continuous professional development through coaching and feedback sessions will further empower teachers and enhance the quality of Islamic education.

## 8. Conclusion.

In conclusion, there is evidence in the research that Saudi Arabia's Islamic education requires a shift in development programmes to embrace peer- and self-

guided professional learning. The present professional learning and development practices are properly supported by institutions but are not needs-oriented. The teachers collectively seek to take charge of their development using programmes that they can lead themselves. Moreover, the teachers want to take the lead in choosing when and where to enroll in religious teaching programmes (Fauzan, 2017). The study shows that IE teachers' growth is attainable through course and training programmes as well as innovative and dynamic teacher-driven learning processes. As such, teachers should be required to engage in forums, conferences, websites and social media and to participate in professional learning communities and mentorships. Professional learning generally helps teachers uphold new research and practice developments related to learning and teaching. However, the paper suggests the need to ensure that these teachers acquire workshops and materials besides those related to transitional learning. Also, research on professional development practices in private religious institutions is limited, so further research in this area is needed.

In this study, IE teachers' professional education practices as well as the factors that impact these practices are extensively investigated. The research demonstrates why the pursuit of enhanced knowledge, wisdom and skills is regarded as a Muslim's mandatory duty. Nonetheless, a primary challenge is evident in the professional development opportunities accessible to IE teachers. The inadequacy of professional growth opportunities has been stressed as a major obstacle to the studying and teaching of IE worldwide. Both the literature review and the findings in this paper show that the investment in efficient IE teaching development substructure is still inadequate (Soules, 2019) and does not parallel the main investment sanctioned for Saudi Arabia's Islamic education programme. These deductions are in line with the traditional trends of Islamic education worldwide, where projects on curriculum development are emphasised more than instructors' professional learning opportunities.

This study made two important contributions to the professional development of Islamic Education teachers. To begin, it identifies and highlights the factors that significantly influence their professional development, such as teaching experience, subjects taught and personal reflections on challenges faced in the classroom. This provides valuable insights for policymakers and educators to prioritise these factors in their professional development initiatives. Second, it presents a range of suggested actions to develop Islamic Education teachers, including training programmes, workshops, teacher-to-teacher visits and the sharing of experiences.

These suggestions offer practical strategies for IE policymakers to implement and improve the professional development opportunities available to teachers.

While the study offers valuable insights into the quality professional development activities among IE teachers in Saudi Arabia, it comes with one major limitation. Convenience and snowball sampling methods were used, which may have introduced selection bias, limiting the generalizability or transferability of the findings. The participants may not be representative of the entire population of IE teachers in Saudi Arabia. A future study using random sampling methods may improve the ability to make broader claims about the entire population of IE teachers in Saudi Arabia.

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