



## Clinical Academic Supervision and Professional Identity Transformation among PAI Teachers in an Indonesian Madrasah

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### ABSTRACT

Academic supervision in many madrasahs often functions as administrative evaluation rather than professional learning for teachers. This study investigates how clinical academic supervision is enacted, and how it shapes the professional identity development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in an Indonesian madrasah. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research was conducted over one academic semester in an Islamic junior secondary school. Data were generated through in-depth interviews, participatory classroom observations, and document analysis involving a principal, a vice principal, and four PAI teachers. Data analysis followed a phenomenological framework to capture participants' lived experiences. The analysis revealed three central experiential themes: a shift from evaluative control to professional trust, reflective dialogue as a source of pedagogical empowerment, and supervision as a catalyst for professional identity transformation. Through collaborative planning, classroom observation, and reflective feedback, teachers gradually reconceptualized supervision as developmental support rather than bureaucratic monitoring. These findings demonstrate that clinical academic supervision can operate as a transformative professional learning practice when grounded in dialogic reflection and trust. The study contributes to expanding instructional leadership scholarship by highlighting how supervision supports the reconstruction of PAI teacher identity within the distinctive context of madrasah education.

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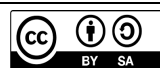
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## INTRODUCTION

Education extends beyond the transmission of disciplinary knowledge; it represents a transformative process that shapes learners' intellectual capacity, ethical awareness, and social responsibility. In Indonesia, educational reforms increasingly emphasize accountability, quality assurance, and professional standards aligned with the aspirations of Society 5.0. Within this landscape, schools including Islamic junior

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secondary schools (madrasahs) are expected not only to improve academic performance but also to nurture students' moral and spiritual development grounded in Islamic values (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). Achieving such transformative outcomes, however, depends fundamentally on teachers' professional growth. Teachers who continuously reflect on their instructional practices, engage in professional learning, and develop their pedagogical expertise are better positioned to facilitate meaningful student learning and character formation.

A growing body of international scholarship demonstrates that sustained, collaborative, and content-focused professional development significantly enhances instructional quality and student outcomes. Converging evidence indicates that structured coaching, professional learning communities, and reflective dialogue enable teachers to refine pedagogical practices and strengthen instructional competence (Hallinger, 2010; Simoncini et al., 2014; Huijboom et al., 2023; Sims et al., 2025). These insights have contributed to a reconceptualization of school leadership, positioning principals not merely as administrative managers but as instructional leaders who actively support teacher development (Tian & Huber, 2020). Within this perspective, instructional leadership prioritizes collaborative professional cultures, formative feedback, and continuous teacher learning over hierarchical control.

Academic supervision constitutes one key mechanism through which instructional leadership is enacted in schools. Research indicates that supervision practices grounded in reflective dialogue, collegial interaction, and formative feedback can strengthen teachers' professional confidence, stimulate pedagogical innovation, and encourage reflective teaching practices (Kraft et al., 2018; Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). Nevertheless, in many contexts, supervision continues to function primarily as a compliance-oriented process emphasizing documentation and bureaucratic reporting rather than professional learning. This tension between developmental and administrative supervision is particularly visible within the Indonesian education system, including madrasahs, where supervisory practices often remain inspection-based despite ongoing reforms.

Recent policy developments have further intensified the need for meaningful professional supervision. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes teacher autonomy, differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and integration of

digital technologies. These changes place increasing professional demands on teachers, particularly in Islamic educational institutions where teachers must balance pedagogical innovation with the preservation of religious and moral values (Lundeto, 2023; Mappanyompa et al., 2025). Consequently, effective supervision is increasingly viewed not merely as evaluative but as a developmental process that supports teachers in navigating pedagogical change.

Within Islamic education settings, the dynamics of supervision become even more complex. Madrasahs are responsible not only for academic achievement but also for cultivating students' moral character and spiritual awareness. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers therefore occupy a unique professional position: they are expected to deliver curriculum content while simultaneously serving as ethical role models. Previous studies have highlighted challenges faced by teachers in balancing curricular reform, moral expectations, and technological change within Islamic educational environments (Ubaedullah et al., 2025; Manshur & Isroani, 2023; Rahman & Ismail, 2022). These multiple responsibilities make professional support structures particularly important. Supervision, in this context, plays a key role in sustaining teacher motivation and commitment.

Despite the growing body of research on academic supervision, most empirical studies have been conducted in general or secular school contexts and have primarily emphasized managerial effectiveness or instructional improvement (Hallinger, 2010; Kraft et al., 2018; Tian & Huber, 2020; Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). As a result, relatively limited attention has been given to how supervisory practices are experienced in faith-based educational environments, particularly in Islamic madrasahs where professional relationships are closely intertwined with religious values and institutional identity (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021; Rahman & Ismail, 2022). In addition, few studies have explored supervision from a phenomenological perspective that captures teachers' lived experiences and the ways supervisory interactions shape their professional identity (Creswell & Poth, 2019; Beauchamp & Thomas, 2022).

To address this gap, the present study investigates teachers' lived experiences of instructional supervision in a madrasah context, focusing on the relational, value-based, and identity-forming dimensions of supervisory practice. Specifically, this study offers a

phenomenological investigation of how Islamic Religious Education teachers experience clinical academic supervision in an Indonesian madrasah. The following research questions guided this inquiry: How do PAI teachers experience clinical academic supervision in the madrasah context? In what ways does clinical academic supervision shape their professional identity? By foregrounding teachers' lived experiences within a faith-based educational environment, this study fills an empirical gap in madrasah-based research and contributes to extending instructional leadership theory by integrating relational, contextual, and identity-based dimensions of supervision.

## **METHOD**

This study adopts a phenomenological design. Phenomenology allows researchers to explore how professional practices are experienced and interpreted by educators in their everyday pedagogical contexts (Finlay, 2011, 2014; Van Manen, 2016). In faith-based settings such as Islamic schools, this approach is particularly useful for capturing how teachers integrate their pedagogical responsibilities with the moral and religious commitments embedded in the institutional culture (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). As such, phenomenology aligns well with the epistemological aim of this study, which seeks to understand academic supervision as a relational and meaning-making process in teachers' professional lives.

To explore this phenomenon empirically, the research was conducted at MTs Negeri 2 Musi Banyuasin, a public Islamic junior secondary school under the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia. The school was selected purposively because it implements structured clinical academic supervision within ongoing curriculum reform initiatives.

From this setting, participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure experiential relevance. The study involved four Islamic Religious Education teachers representing different subject areas within the PAI curriculum: Qur'an–Hadith, Aqidah Akhlaq, Fiqh, and Islamic Cultural History (Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam). The teachers' professional experience ranged from 3 to 15 years. The participant group consisted of two male and two female teachers, all holding at least a bachelor's degree in Islamic education. In addition, the school principal participated as the academic supervisor, and

the vice principal for curriculum served as the supervision coordinator. All teacher participants had previously participated in formal academic supervision cycles. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was achieved, indicated by recurring experiential patterns across participants' narratives (Saunders et al., 2018).

Regarding data collection procedures, data were collected over a three-month period using multiple qualitative techniques in order to capture both participants' lived experiences and the institutional context of supervision.

First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to explore their experiences of the supervision process, including pre-observation meetings, classroom observations, feedback discussions, emotional responses, and perceived professional growth. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Follow-up clarification questions were conducted when necessary to deepen participants' reflections.

Second, observations were also conducted during supervision cycles involving the four teachers. A total of eight observation sessions were carried out, reflecting two complete supervision cycles for each of the four teachers. These sessions included supervision planning conferences, classroom teaching observations, and post-observation feedback discussions. Field notes were used to document interaction patterns, feedback exchanges, and dialogical engagement during the supervision process.

Third, in addition to interviews and observations, institutional documents were analyzed to understand how supervision policies and procedures were formally structured within the school. These documents included supervision guidelines, classroom observation instruments, supervision reports, and teachers' instructional planning documents. In total, eight institutional documents were reviewed to provide contextual information that supported the interpretation of participants' experiences.

The data collected from these multiple sources were then analyzed following a phenomenological analytic framework adapted from Beauchamp & Thomas (2022) and Creswell & Poth (2019). The analysis process was also guided by Finlay's (2014) four key processes of phenomenological analysis: seeing afresh, dwelling, explicating, and languaging. The analysis began with repeated reading of interview transcripts and observation notes in order to achieve immersion in participants' narratives (dwelling).

Significant statements describing participants' experiences of supervision were then identified and extracted (seeing afresh). These statements were condensed into meaning units representing key aspects of the experience (explicating).

The meaning units were subsequently grouped into experiential thematic clusters that reflected shared experiential patterns across participants. From these themes, the analysis generated textural descriptions (i.e., descriptions of what participants experienced during the supervision process) and structural descriptions, which explain how contextual factors and interactions shaped those experiences (linguaging). These two forms of description were then synthesized to identify the essence of the phenomenon, referring to the core shared meaning of how clinical academic supervision is experienced by teachers in this context. This iterative and reflective process ensured that interpretations remained grounded in participants' narratives.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed to ensure methodological rigor. Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of multiple data sources, including interview transcripts, observation field notes, and supervision documents. Member checking was conducted by returning summarized interview transcripts to participants so they could verify the accuracy of their statements and clarify potential misunderstandings.

Transferability was supported through detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, and supervision practices, allowing readers to evaluate the relevance of the findings to similar educational settings. Dependability was maintained by documenting the research procedures, coding processes, and analytical decisions in an audit trail throughout the study. Confirmability was reinforced through reflexive memo-writing during the analysis process and peer debriefing with colleagues to minimize potential researcher bias.

Finally, ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, and confidentiality was ensured by anonymizing identities and securely storing recorded materials. Institutional permission was formally obtained from the school administration before the fieldwork commenced. Participation was voluntary, and participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

This study was conducted at MTs Negeri 2 Musi Banyuasin, a public Islamic junior secondary school under the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Indonesia. Six participants were involved: four Islamic Education (PAI) teachers (T1–T4), the principal (P), and the vice principal for curriculum affairs (VP). Data were collected during the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year through in-depth interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis. The analysis revealed three interconnected experiential patterns that describe how teachers experienced the academic supervision process.

#### ***Initial Anxiety and the Reinterpretation of Supervision***

When recalling the moment the supervision schedule was announced, one teacher described an immediate sense of tension. After a brief pause during the interview, T1 quietly described the experience:

“When the supervision schedule was announced, I felt anxious because I saw it as a strict performance assessment.” (T1)

A similar feeling was expressed by another teacher when describing the moment before classroom observation began. T2 spoke slowly while recalling the situation:

“Before the principal entered my classroom, I felt worried because I was afraid that my mistakes would be noticed.” (T2)

Taken together, these accounts reveal that the announcement of supervision was initially experienced as a moment of psychological tension, reflecting teachers’ prior assumptions that supervision primarily functioned as evaluative control rather than developmental support.

Observation data provided further contextual insight into this stage. Prior to classroom visits, the principal conducted short preparatory briefings in the teachers’ room to clarify the objectives and procedures of supervision. During classroom observations, the principal positioned herself at the back of the classroom and recorded structured notes without interrupting the instructional process.

Following the post-observation dialogue, however, teachers described a noticeable shift in their perception of supervision. After reflecting on the discussion sessions with the principal, teachers began to reinterpret the purpose of supervision.

T3 explained this change while recalling the feedback meeting:

“After the discussion session, I felt guided rather than judged.” (T3)

Similarly, T4 emphasized how the post-observation conversation reshaped their understanding of the process:

“The conversation after the observation made me realize that the goal was improvement, not criticism.” (T4)

Across interviews, teachers consistently described this transition from initial anxiety to a more constructive interpretation of supervision once they experienced the full supervision cycle.

### ***Dialogic Feedback and Instructional Refinement***

When discussing the feedback stage of supervision, participants repeatedly emphasized the conversational and reflective nature of the interaction. During the interview, T2 leaned forward slightly while explaining how the feedback sessions typically began:

“We were first asked to explain how we felt during the lesson before receiving any suggestions.” (T2)

This approach encouraged teachers to reflect on their own instructional practices before external feedback was offered. T1 elaborated on the practical nature of the suggestions received during supervision meetings:

“The feedback was practical, such as how to make students more active or how to simplify complex fiqh concepts.” (T1)

These accounts suggest that feedback was experienced not as top-down correction but as a collaborative discussion focused on instructional improvement.

Field observations confirmed that post-observation meetings were conducted individually in a conversational format. The principal encouraged reflective dialogue before providing recommendations, allowing teachers to articulate their own evaluation of the lesson. The vice principal for curriculum (VP) also reviewed lesson plans prior to

classroom observations to ensure alignment with curriculum standards and instructional objectives.

Analysis of supervision documentation further supported these findings. Written feedback emphasized clarity of learning objectives, classroom management, strategies for student engagement, and the integration of character education values within Islamic Education subjects. The tone of the written comments was developmental rather than corrective, reinforcing the dialogic nature of the supervision process.

### ***Strengthened Professional Confidence and Commitment***

Several teachers described how recognition of their instructional efforts gradually strengthened their professional confidence. During the interview, T3 spoke with visible enthusiasm while recalling a moment when their teaching strategy was acknowledged:

“When my instructional innovations were appreciated, I became more confident in trying new teaching methods.” (T3)

Another participant reflected on how supervision encouraged a stronger commitment to improving teaching quality. T4 explained:

“Supervision made me more aware that the quality of teaching must continuously improve.” (T4)

These reflections suggest that supervision contributed not only to instructional refinement but also to the development of teachers’ professional confidence and commitment.

A comparative review of lesson planning documents before and after supervision indicated several improvements, including clearer formulation of learning objectives, more systematic assessment design, and stronger alignment between instructional strategies and expected competencies.

At the same time, teachers acknowledged that the supervision process required additional preparation. Reflecting on this aspect, T1 explained:

“Preparing for supervision requires extra time, but now I see it as a professional responsibility rather than pressure.” (T1)

This statement illustrates how teachers gradually reinterpreted supervision as part of their professional responsibility rather than as an external evaluation pressure.

### ***Phenomenological Synthesis: Transformation of Professional Meaning***

Taken together, these experiences reveal a broader transformation in how teachers came to understand the meaning of supervision. Teachers' experiences moved through three interconnected phases: initial anxiety when supervision was announced, reflective engagement during dialogic feedback sessions, and the development of renewed professional confidence and commitment.

This progression suggests that supervision functioned not merely as an evaluative mechanism but as a relational and developmental process through which teachers renegotiated the meaning of their professional practice. Through supportive dialogue and constructive feedback, teachers gradually reinterpreted supervision from a potentially threatening evaluation into a collaborative space for professional learning and instructional improvement.

In phenomenological terms, the essence of this experience lies in the transformation of teachers' understanding of supervision—from an external mechanism of control into a reflective and relational process that strengthens professional agency, instructional responsibility, and commitment to continuous improvement.

## **Discussion**

### ***Repositioning Academic Supervision as Context-Sensitive Developmental Leadership***

The findings of this study support previous research demonstrating that academic supervision contributes to the improvement of teachers' instructional practices and professional learning (Hallinger, 2010; Huijboom et al., 2023). However, in contrast to previous studies that mainly focus on instructional outcomes, the phenomenological evidence generated from teachers' experiences reveals that supervision is not experienced solely as a technical intervention. Instead, participants described supervision as a relational interaction that significantly shaped their understanding of their professional roles. This suggests that professional identity reconstruction may function as an underlying mechanism through which pedagogical improvement occurs.

This interpretation aligns with research indicating that instructional leadership practices become more effective when supervision is embedded within collaborative professional cultures and reflective dialogue (Nguyen & Hallinger, 2023). The present

study expands this literature by demonstrating that within the madrasah context, supervision contributes not only to pedagogical refinement but also to the strengthening of teachers' professional identity through relational trust and dialogic engagement.

These findings also resonate with research on leadership in faith-based educational institutions, which emphasizes that leadership practices in religious schools are frequently embedded within ethical and value-oriented frameworks rather than purely managerial logics (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). Building on these insights, the present study demonstrates that clinical supervision can institutionalize reflective accountability within a value-oriented educational culture. Taken together, these findings suggest that instructional leadership in Islamic schooling contexts may be better understood as context-sensitive developmental leadership, in which relational legitimacy and identity affirmation mediate the relationship between supervision and instructional improvement.

#### ***Dialogic Feedback as Epistemic and Ethical Co-Construction***

Previous research consistently demonstrates that structured feedback and instructional coaching play an important role in improving teaching quality (Kraft et al., 2018; Timperley, 2021; Wisniewski et al., 2020). The findings of the present study support this conclusion while providing additional insight into the relational conditions that shape how feedback is interpreted by teachers. Although meta-analytic research highlights the effectiveness of explicit feedback for improving instructional practice (Wisniewski et al., 2020), the experiences documented in this study indicate that the relational environment in which feedback is delivered is equally important. When feedback was communicated through reflective dialogue, teachers perceived supervision as professional support rather than institutional evaluation.

Within Islamic educational environments, this relational dimension carries additional normative significance. Leadership practices in faith-based institutions are often associated with expectations of ethical conduct and moral responsibility (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). Consequently, supervision in this context functioned simultaneously as pedagogical guidance and moral affirmation. From this perspective, dialogic supervision may be understood not only as an epistemic practice that supports professional learning but also as an ethical interaction grounded in mutual recognition and respect.

### ***Supervision as a Site of Professional Identity Reconstruction***

A central theoretical contribution of this study lies in conceptualizing supervision as a context in which teachers' professional identities are reconstructed. Teacher identity is widely understood as dynamic and socially negotiated rather than fixed or static (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2022; Hökkä et al., 2023). However, supervision research rarely conceptualizes supervisory encounters themselves as identity-forming experiences.

The findings suggest that reflective dialogue during supervision provides an institutional space in which teachers reinterpret their professional roles and responsibilities. Recognition and constructive interaction with supervisors contributed to renewed professional confidence and agency. These observations support previous research emphasizing the relational foundations of professional learning while extending existing supervision theory. Specifically, the findings indicate that identity negotiation mediates the relationship between supervisory feedback and instructional change. Rather than producing immediate behavioral compliance, supervision in this context appears to foster pedagogical improvement through processes of relational trust and identity affirmation.

In madrasah settings, where teachers are expected to demonstrate both pedagogical competence and moral integrity, this identity dimension becomes particularly significant. Clinical supervision therefore operates not only as a mechanism for instructional monitoring but also as an identity-formative leadership practice.

### ***Distributed Leadership as Normative Alignment***

The supervision practices observed in this study also illustrate how distributed leadership operates within Islamic secondary schools. Previous research indicates that distributed leadership can support school improvement by coordinating leadership responsibilities and professional expertise across institutional roles (Harris et al., 2022; Nguyen & Hallinger, 2023). The present study extends current scholarship by showing that distributed supervision in Islamic schooling contexts functions as a form of normative alignment. Leadership distribution in this setting does not merely involve the delegation of administrative tasks but also reinforces shared ethical commitments guiding pedagogical practice.

This interpretation aligns with research on leadership in faith-based institutions, which emphasizes that leadership distribution frequently involves collective moral stewardship alongside organizational coordination (Berkovich & Eyal, 2021). In this sense, distributed supervision within madrasahs represents a value-integrated leadership practice rather than a purely structural arrangement.

### ***Advancing Faith-Based Instructional Leadership Theory***

Although instructional leadership has been widely examined in secular education systems, its enactment within Islamic secondary schools remains relatively underexplored. The phenomenological findings of this study indicate that the effectiveness of supervision in this context is shaped by interconnected relational and identity-based processes. Three interrelated constructs emerged from the analysis: relational trust, identity affirmation, and moral-symbolic legitimacy. Rather than functioning independently, these constructs form a relational pathway through which supervision influences teachers' professional engagement. The conceptual pathway derived from the phenomenological analysis is summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Model of Professional Identity Transformation through Clinical Academic Supervision in the Madrasah Context*



Source. Developed by the Authors

As dialogic supervision encourages reflective interaction between teachers and school leaders, relational trust gradually develops through respectful communication and professional recognition. As trust develops, teachers experience identity affirmation through the recognition of their pedagogical competence and professional commitment. Over time, the interaction between relational trust and identity affirmation contributes to the emergence of moral-symbolic legitimacy. Within the madrasah context, supervisory authority was therefore interpreted not merely as administrative control, but as ethically grounded leadership rooted in mutual recognition and trust.

By highlighting these interconnected processes, the present study expands instructional leadership theory beyond predominantly secular organizational assumptions. Specifically, the findings suggest that leadership practices in Islamic schools may be better understood as value-integrated instructional leadership, where pedagogical improvement is closely intertwined with relational trust, ethical legitimacy, and professional identity formation.

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the study involved four teachers within a single madrasah, which limits empirical generalizability. However, consistent with phenomenological research, the purpose of this study is to provide theoretical insight and analytical transferability rather than statistical generalization. Second, the findings rely primarily on teachers' reported experiences obtained through interviews and reflective dialogue sessions. Although these narratives offer valuable insight into lived experiences, they may not fully capture how supervision practices influence long-term instructional behavior. Finally, the study reflects a particular stage within an ongoing professional development process. Future longitudinal research could therefore provide deeper insight into how relational trust, identity affirmation, and moral legitimacy develop across extended supervision cycles.

## **CONCLUSION**

This phenomenological study aimed to understand how Islamic Education (PAI) teachers experience clinical academic supervision in an Indonesian state madrasah and how this process influences their professional transformation. The findings reveal that academic supervision, when enacted as developmental and dialogic leadership rather than

bureaucratic inspection, reshapes teachers' professional identity, strengthens instructional confidence, and refines pedagogical practice.

The most significant insight emerging from this study is that professional identity reconstruction precedes observable instructional improvement, indicating that meaningful pedagogical change is mediated by teachers' evolving sense of professional recognition and trust within the supervisory relationship. Teachers initially approached supervision with evaluative anxiety rooted in institutional accountability structures; however, through relationally grounded supervisory interactions, this anxiety gradually transformed into reflective engagement. When supervision emphasized collaborative planning, focused observation, reflective dialogue, and coordinated follow-up, it functioned not merely as instructional monitoring but as a meaningful process of professional sense-making.

This finding extends instructional leadership scholarship by demonstrating that supervision in Islamic secondary education operates as a relational and ontological process of professional becoming. Instructional improvement did not emerge solely from technical feedback but from teachers' growing sense of professional recognition, trust, and moral legitimacy within the supervisory relationship.

The study also carries practical implications for multiple stakeholders. For madrasah principals, the findings suggest that investing time in building relational trust and affirming teachers' professional identity is foundational to effective supervision rather than a preliminary step before evaluation. For educational policymakers and supervision trainers, the results indicate that professional development programs for supervisors should emphasize dialogic communication, relational leadership, and identity-affirming feedback alongside procedural and technical supervision competencies.

While these findings offer rich insights into the lived experience of supervision within one madrasah, they should be interpreted within the contextual boundaries of a small phenomenological sample. The experiences described here are not intended for empirical generalization but for deep understanding of a specific supervisory context. Future research may therefore explore clinical academic supervision across diverse Islamic educational institutions, different teacher demographics, and longer supervisory

cycles to examine how professional identity transformation unfolds across varying institutional environments.

By illuminating academic supervision as a site of professional identity formation and moral recognition, this study invites further inquiry into the relational and ethical dimensions of instructional leadership in faith-based education. Such work can contribute to a more contextually grounded understanding of teacher professional development. Ultimately, this study calls for a more humane and relationally attentive approach to instructional leadership within Islamic schooling systems.

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