



Between Akhlakul Karimah and Digital Competence: The Reflective Journey of Islamic Education Teachers in the Modern Era

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the actualization and contribution of Islamic Religious Education teacher reflection in improving learning quality at Madrasah. Professional development does not automatically transform classroom practice without systematic reflection. Urban madrasahs require pedagogical innovation, digital adaptation, and affective-spiritual formation. This qualitative study used a single-case design involving two school leaders and three Islamic Religious Education teachers. Data were collected through interviews, nonparticipant observation, and documentation, then analyzed thematically with triangulation and member checking. Findings reveal three forms of reflection: individual, collegial, and action-based reflection through classroom action research. Individual reflection helps teachers identify strengths, weaknesses, and student needs. Collegial reflection broadens solutions through peer feedback and the sharing of competencies. Reflective practices encourage interactive, contextual, and problem-based learning. Reflection promotes integration of digital media into religious learning. Furthermore, reflection strengthens affective-spiritual learning through dialogue, habituation, and the internalization of values. Theoretically, the study proposes a transformative reflection cycle linking professional development with pedagogical, digital, and affective-spiritual transformation. Practically, madrasahs should institutionalize reflective journals, collegial forums, academic supervision, digital mentoring, and classroom action research as an integrated professional development ecosystem.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers occupy a strategic position in ensuring the sustainability of educational quality because they connect students' policies, curriculum, knowledge, values, and learning experiences. In a digital society, this role is increasingly important because technological, artificial intelligence, and information consumption changes are reshaping how young people learn, interact, and build knowledge. Therefore, teacher professionalism is not merely mastery of the material; it also includes the ability to assess one's own practice, adjust learning strategies, and update competencies on an ongoing basis. Research on professional development shows that improving teacher competence is related to the quality of learning practices, especially when the development is contextual, reflective, and sustainable (Mulyana et al., 2023; Zaqiah et al., 2024). Thus,

the study of reflection on professional development is important for the wider community because the quality of teachers' pedagogical decisions ultimately determines the relevance, meaning, and transformative power of education for students amid rapid social change in a fair, adaptive, and sustainable manner.

This urgency becomes stronger in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), because teachers are not only responsible for cognitive achievements, but also for the formation of character, spirituality, and students' ability to assess moral issues critically. Changes in the digital environment present both opportunities and risks: religious learning resources are becoming more accessible, but religious information can also be received partially, superficially, or without adequate authority. Recent studies show that the spiritual competence of PAI teachers contributes to the quality of learning and exemplarity, while integrating religious education with 21st-century competencies is needed to keep learning contextual and meaningful (Samad et al., 2023; Nasucha et al., 2023). Therefore, the community needs PAI teachers who can reflect on the effectiveness of learning, assess the suitability of methods with the needs of students, and translate the results of reflection into pedagogical improvements that maintain the depth of value as well as the relevance of the times in social life that is increasingly complex, open, and digitalized.

The general problem behind this study is the uneven ability of teachers to turn professional development activities into real changes in learning. Training programs, Teacher Professional Education, learning communities, seminars, or the use of technology can improve professional knowledge, but the impact does not always automatically translate into improved teaching strategies. Riyanti's (2021) research shows that teachers' reflection is often still at a basic level, while Murwaningsih et al. (2021) found that implementing sustainable professional development requires strategies that align with teachers' needs and obstacles. In the context of PAI, the problem is increasingly complex because teachers must balance administrative demands, mastery of technology, strengthening pedagogical competence, and responsibility for religious values. As a result, reflection can lapse into a personal evaluation without structured follow-up. This condition creates a gap between the professional development that teachers participate in and the improvement in learning quality that students really feel, in a measurable, consistent, and aligned manner with actual learning needs.

Field phenomena relevant to the problem can be seen in the context of urban madrasas, where students live in an information ecosystem that is fast, visual, interactive, and heavily influenced by digital technology. These characteristics require PAI teachers to design learning that is not only normative, but also contextual, dialogical, and supported by appropriate media. Research on digital literacy among PAI teachers shows that technology use remains often limited to simple applications. In contrast, the production of digital teaching materials and more transformative pedagogical designs has not been optimally developed (Reksiana et al., 2024). Other studies have also shown that digital media can increase learning engagement when designed appropriately (Jannah et al., 2025). At the same time, administrative burdens, differences in digital skills among teachers, limitations in collaboration, and follow-up evaluations have the potential to hinder the realization of reflection results into collectively and sustainably learned innovations.

The literature over the last five years shows that reflection has been seen as an important mechanism in teachers' professional development. Purwanto et al. (2023) show that reflective practice can help prospective PAI teachers build professional

awareness, while Riyanti (2021) found that reflection helps teachers recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching, though its depth remains limited. In terms of professional development, Mulyana et al. (2023) emphasized the importance of continuous development for PAI and madrasah teachers, while Zaqiah et al. (2024) showed that in-office professional education can improve the pedagogical, personality, social, and professional competence of PAI teachers. These findings provide a solid basis for the interrelation of reflection and professional development. However, some studies still treat reflection as an individual process or assess competency improvement as a program output, so there is little explanation of the concrete process by which reflection results are translated into observable learning changes in madrasas in the context of real teacher work.

Another research group highlighted the role of digital transformation in PAI learning. Susanti et al. (2024) mapped the use of social media as a means of learning innovation; Hamdi et al. (2024) developed digital-based PAI modules; and Reksiana et al. (2024) found that the digital competence of PAI teachers remains dominant in the use of simple media. The study by Rahmah et al. (2025) shows that PAI teachers can adapt media to students' contexts but face limitations in technological creativity, collaboration, and systematic evaluation. Ritonga et al. (2026) also emphasized that digital competence in the professional education of PAI teachers is not sufficiently understood as a technical skill, as it is influenced by institutional support, professional autonomy, and pedagogical design. The weakness of the literature is that the focus tends to be separated among reflection, competence, technology, and media innovation. Therefore, research is needed that connects these four aspects in a process of empirical learning quality development in the context of urban Indonesian *madrasah aliyah*.

The novelty of this research lies in the integrative analysis of how reflection on the development of the PAI teacher profession is processed, interpreted, and transformed into improving the quality of learning in the context of urban *madrasah aliyah*. Unlike previous research that predominantly discussed the effectiveness of professional programs, digital competency levels, reflection practices, or media use separately, this study places reflection as a connecting mechanism between professional development experience and pedagogical change. State-of-the-art research is directed at three main relationships: the source of professional experience that triggers reflection, the form of reflection that teachers engage in, and the follow-up of reflection in planning, methods, media, assessment, and learning interactions. The focus on madrasas in the context of urban madrasas highlights the pressure to adapt to technology, meet academic expectations, and strengthen values simultaneously. With this framework, the research is expected to produce a picture of the process, not just a measurement of competencies or an in-depth inventory of professional development activities.

Based on these gaps, the problem this research examines is how reflection on the professional development of PAI teachers is used to improve the quality of learning in madrasas, what factors support and hinder the process, and how the outcomes of reflection are manifested in changes in pedagogical practices. The current argument of this study is that professional development will have a stronger impact when teachers engage in systematic reflection, evidence-based learning, professional collaboration, and follow corrective actions that can be evaluated. In contrast, sporadic reflection and lack of institutional support tend to stop at personal awareness without practical transformation. Thus, this research contributes theoretically by clarifying the relationship

between reflection, professional development, and PAI learning quality; empirically by presenting evidence from the urban aliyah madrasah; and practically by providing a basis for recommendations for teachers and madrasas to build a reflective, collaborative, and sustainable cycle of professional development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative, single-case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the process of reflection on the development of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teacher profession and its contribution to improving the quality of learning at MAN 4 Jakarta. The case study design was chosen because the research focuses on one bounded system: the practice of professional reflection among PAI teachers in the context of the organization, academic culture, and learning process in one Madrasah. Case studies allow researchers to examine phenomena in context using various sources of evidence and to understand the holistic relationship between professional development experiences, reflection processes, and changes in pedagogical practices (Mtisi, 2022). The selection of this design is also relevant to the research of Purwanto et al. (2023) which shows that qualitative case studies can be used to in-depth reveal the reflective practices of PAI teachers through interviews, observations, and documentation, and are reinforced by the findings of Tachie, S. A. (2026) which affirms that case studies are effective for exploring pedagogical practices in the context of real education. The unit of analysis in this research is a reflection process on the development of the PAI teacher profession.

The research was carried out purposively at MAN 4 Jakarta Campus A, Jalan Ciputat Raya, Pondok Pinang, Kebayoran Lama District, South Jakarta. This location was chosen because it represents state aliyah madrasas in urban areas that face the demands of teacher professionalism, digital transformation, and improved learning quality. The informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique involving the Head of the Madrasah, the Deputy Head of Curriculum, and three PAI teachers. The selection of these cross-role informants allows analysis from the perspective of learning policies and practices, in line with qualitative research principles that emphasize depth of experience (Muslih et al., 2024; Purwanto et al., 2023). This approach is also strengthened by Morgan, H. (2024), who affirms the importance of perspective triangulation in educational studies to increase the validity of findings.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, nonparticipant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were used to explore teachers' reflection experiences, obstacles, and follow-up on professional development. Nonparticipant observations were conducted to see firsthand learning practices, including teacher-student interaction, media use, and implementation of reflection results. The documentation study includes lesson plans, reflection journals, PKG, training certificates, and madrasah documents. This combination of techniques aligns with contemporary Islamic education research that emphasizes the importance of multiple data sources (Muslih et al., 2024; Tachie, S. A., 2026). In addition, Assalihee et al. (2024) emphasized that integrating observation data and documents is essential to understanding the implementation of teacher reflection in learning as a whole.

Data analysis was carried out interactively from data collection to conclusion drawing by following the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña models. The process starts with data reduction, coding, and categorization, and culminates in the formation of the main theme. The themes that emerged were then analyzed thematically to see the relationship between professional reflection and changes in learning practices. Bingham (2023)

emphasized that qualitative analysis must be systematic from data organization to thematic interpretation. This process is reinforced by Naeem et al. (2023), who emphasize the importance of thematic analysis in building conceptual models of qualitative research. In addition, Tachie (2026) noted that the consistency of the analysis is very important for maintaining the credibility of the findings in educational case studies.

The validity of the data is maintained through source triangulation, technical triangulation, member checking, and trail auditing. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing data from madrasah heads, curriculum representatives, and PAI teachers. Triangulation was carried out by matching the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking is carried out to ensure the researcher's interpretation aligns with the informant's experience. Trail audits systematically document the entire research process. Mtisi (2022) emphasized that triangulation is an important element in qualitative case studies. Bingham (2023) also emphasizes the importance of transparency of the analysis process to improve dependability. Morgan, H. (2024) added that the validity of educational research increases when data verification is carried out systematically in layers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Updating the Professional Reflections of PAI Teachers

The actualization of reflection on the professional development of PAI teachers in this study is interpreted as a concrete form of the process of evaluating professional experience, carried out by teachers and followed up in the practice of competency development and learning improvement. In this sense, reflection does not only refer to the activity of rethinking the teaching experience. Instead, it includes identifying learning strengths and weaknesses, formulating alternative improvements, discussing problems with peers, and developing professional actions based on the evaluation results. Based on the results of interviews, nonparticipant observations, and documentation review, it was found that three main forms of reflection actualization of PAI teacher professional development in Madrasah were found, namely self-evaluation through post-learning reflection journals, collegial reflection through the teacher learning community, and reflection follow-up through the preparation and implementation of Class Action Research (PTK). These three forms show that reflection takes place in both individual and collective dimensions and is directed at improving the quality of learning practices.

The first form of actualization can be seen in self-evaluation activities after the implementation of learning. Teachers use reflection notes to identify the parts of the learning that have been effective, the material that is still difficult for students to understand, students' responses to the methods used, and the weaknesses in the learning management. This was explained by the teacher of Akidah Akhlak, who stated:

"Initially, filling out a daily reflection journal felt tiring because after teaching, the energy had been drained. But after a few months, this became a necessity. I found out that when teaching the material 'Reprehensible Morals' in class XI-A, the children were bored because I had been dictating too much book text. The results of this reflection were immediately used to change the way teaching was conducted in class XI-B, using case study analysis through short videos. The results are different; children begin to scramble to deliver arguments" (Interview, April 2026).

The data show that teachers use reflection journals to connect learning experiences with pedagogical decisions in the next meeting or class.

The results of the interviews also showed that reflection did not stop at individual

evaluation, but was developed through collegial interaction between PAI teachers. The PAI KKG Coordinator explained:

"Through coordination groups and bi-weekly virtual meetings, we threw draft learning modules at each other to be criticized. Young teachers who master digital applications help senior teachers create interactive presentation media. We also often dissect cases of urban children's behavior that is addicted to online games during religious school hours. So, the results of personal reflection in each class are brought to this forum to find a joint solution" (Interview, April 2026).

The statement shows a change in the character of reflection from a personal process to a collegial process. In the researcher's interpretation, the forum functions as a space for sharing experiences, providing peer feedback, transferring digital skills, and facilitating collaborative problem-solving and learning. Thus, teachers' individual experiences can develop into shared professional knowledge that can be used in PAI learning.

The next form of actualization is found in the follow-up of reflection through scientific activities, especially Class Action Research (PTK). Based on the results of the review of teacher professional development documents, the learning problems that repeatedly appear in the evaluation notes can serve as the focus of more systematic corrective actions. Problems such as low student involvement, difficulty understanding certain materials, and the inability to read the Qur'an up to expectations provide a basis for teachers to consider using different learning strategies and to test their effectiveness in the learning process. In this context, PTK becomes a further form of reflection because teachers not only identify problems, but also design actions, implement improvements, observe changes, and evaluate the results. The researcher's interpretation of the documentation data shows that converting reflection results into PTK positions the teacher as both a practitioner and a researcher in their own learning. Therefore, reflection takes on a more systematic form, leading to corrective actions that can be documented, evaluated, and refined.

The results of nonparticipant observations strengthened the interview data and documentation. In the PAI learning process, researchers found that teachers made efforts to adjust learning strategies by using digital media, providing students with discussion spaces, and managing classroom interactions in ways that were more responsive to learning conditions. Teachers not only deliver material in one direction but also encourage students to provide responses and arguments to the material or cases discussed. The use of learning media also appears to be intended to help explain the material while maintaining student involvement throughout the learning process. The observational findings are consistent with the informant's statement that previous learning weaknesses are taken into account in determining the approach to the next learning. According to the researchers' interpretation, the alignment between the teacher's statements and classroom practices suggests that reflection has had practical implications for pedagogical action. Reflection not only raises awareness of learning shortcomings but also encourages teachers to adjust their methods, media, interaction patterns, and classroom management.

Based on the overall data, it can be stated that the actualization of reflection on the professional development of PAI teachers in madrasas occurs through three interconnected patterns: individual reflection, collegial reflection, and scientific action-based reflection. Individual reflection is realized through evaluation and recording of post-learning experiences; Collegial reflection is manifested through discussion, criticism of learning tools, problem-solving, and competency exchange in the teacher community;

while action-based reflection is realized by developing learning problems into corrective actions through PTK. Interview, observation, and documentation data show that the three forms do not run as completely separate activities, but form a series: teachers discover problems through teaching experiences, evaluate them personally, consult or discuss them with peers, and then implement alternative improvements in learning. Thus, reflection on professional development in the context of this research can be understood as a cycle of continuous pedagogical improvement that connects experience evaluation, professional collaboration, action for improvement, and re-evaluation of learning outcomes.

Based on the overall data, it can be stated that the actualization of reflection on the development of the PAI teacher profession in madrassas occurs through three interconnected patterns: individual reflection, collegial reflection, and scientific action-based reflection. Individual reflection is realized through evaluation and recording of post-learning experiences; Collegial reflection is manifested through discussion, criticism of learning tools, problem-solving, and competency exchange in the teacher community; while action-based reflection is realized by developing learning problems into corrective actions through PTK. Interview, observation, and documentation data show that the three forms do not occur separately but form a series that begins with learning experiences, problem identification, individual and collegial reflection, formulation of corrective actions, implementation of changes, and re-evaluation. The relationship between the stages of actualization of the reflection of the development of the PAI teacher profession is visualized in Figure 1.

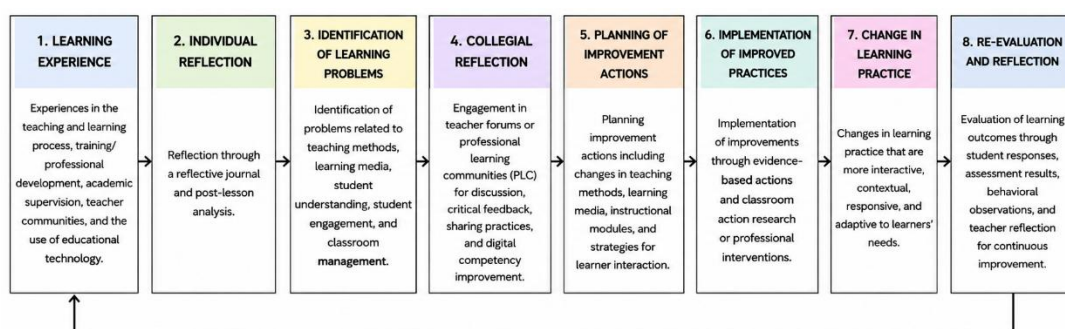


Figure 1. An Updated Model for Reflection on the Professional Development of PAI Teachers

Figure 1 shows that the actualization of the reflection on the development of the PAI teacher profession follows a cyclical, not linear, pattern. Learning experiences become a source of individual reflection, leading to problem identification. The problem is then deepened through collegial reflection to produce alternative remedial actions. The selected actions are implemented in learning or developed through PTK; the results are then re-evaluated and become material for reflection in the next cycle. Thus, reflection serves as a connecting mechanism between teaching experience, professional development, and changes in pedagogical practice.

Contribution of Reflection to the Quality of PAI Learning

The contribution of reflection to the professional development of PAI teachers in this study is interpreted as a positive change in the learning process that arises after teachers evaluate their teaching experience, identify learning weaknesses, and follow up on the results of reflection through adjustments to pedagogical practices. Based on the results of interviews, nonparticipant observations, and documentation studies, the

contribution can be seen in three main subthemes: increasing the variety of interactive and humanist learning methods, optimizing the pedagogical use of digital media, and strengthening the affective-spiritual dimension and internalizing students' moral values. These three subthemes show that reflection on professional development is not only about improving teachers' knowledge or skills, but also about how teachers design learning experiences that better align with students' characteristics. Thus, the quality of learning in the context of this research is understood in a multidimensional manner, including the involvement of students in the learning process, the depth of understanding of religious materials, the ability to connect materials with life problems, the productive use of technology, and the strengthening of religious attitudes and values.

The results of the interview with the Deputy Head of Madrasah for Curriculum showed that the most visible change after strengthening the reflection activity was an increase in the variation of PAI learning methodologies. Explain:

"We monitor directly through academic supervision. After this culture of reflection intensifies, there are quite visible changes in the quality of PAI teachers' learning. Religious classes no longer only take place in one direction. Teachers can now combine problem-based learning with the realities of adolescent life. Students were invited to discuss a group dissecting fiqh law regarding digital transactions, paylater, and cyber world issues from the perspective of Islamic law. The learning process becomes lively, and children's understanding of religious values is also more contextual" (Interview, May 2026).

The statement shows that reflection results are used to evaluate the limitations of lecture-based learning and to encourage teachers to choose strategies that provide a wider space for students to discuss, solve problems, and connect religious concepts with contemporary phenomena. In the researchers' interpretation, these changes show the contribution of reflection to the dimensions of the learning process, especially by increasing involvement, the relevance of the material, and students' thinking activities.

Other contributions are found in the affective-spiritual dimension and the formation of learners' behaviors. The Head of the Madrasah emphasized that the quality of PAI learning is not solely assessed based on academic achievements. He stated:

"For us in madrasahs, the highest quality of PAI learning is one of the indicators is morality. It is not enough for children to get high exam scores if, in their daily lives, they are unable to take care of themselves. The reflections of PAI teachers make them more aware that they not only deliver material but also accompany the development of students' character. Teachers become closer, understand children's problems better, and religious learning is directed so that these values are truly included in their lives" (Interview, May 2026).

The data indicate that reflection encourages teachers to expand their learning orientation from cognitive achievement to moral and spiritual assistance. The researcher's interpretation shows that the change in orientation is reflected in efforts to build two-way communication, relate religious materials to students' experiences, and incorporate examples and dialogue into the process of internalizing values.

Visually, the relationship between reflection on professional development and its contribution to the quality of learning can be described as follows:

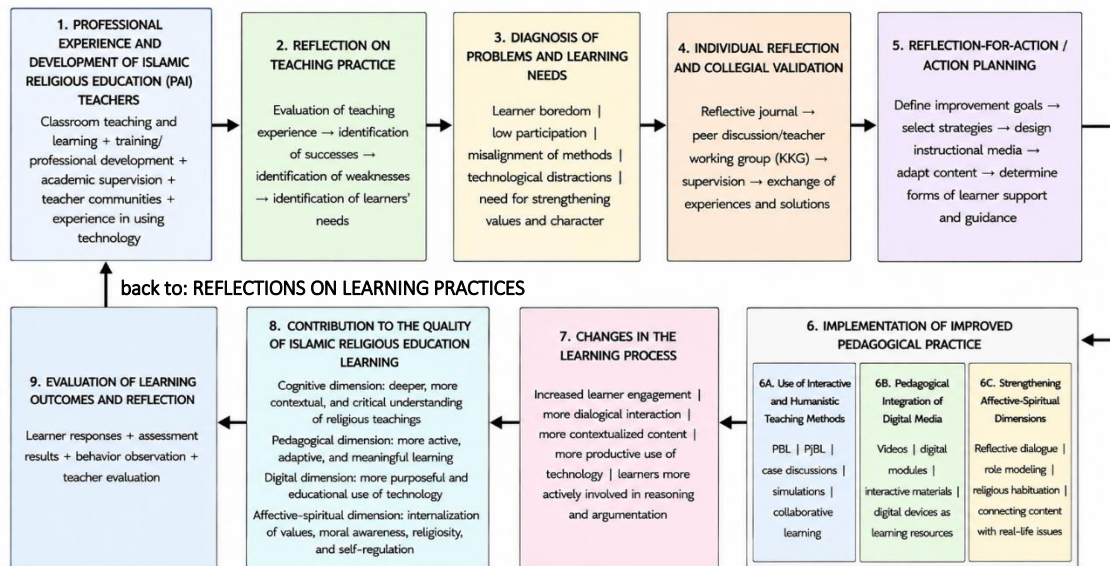


Figure 2. Flow of Reflection on the Professional Development of PAI Teachers to Improve the Quality of Learning

Figure 2 shows that the contribution of reflection to the development of the PAI teacher profession in improving the quality of learning occurs through a cyclical, gradual, and sustainable process. Reflection does not directly improve the quality of learning; rather, it first serves as an evaluative mechanism to identify weaknesses, successes, and learning needs based on the teacher's real classroom experience. The results of this reflection are then deepened through individual and collegial processes, so that teachers can formulate more appropriate follow-up by improving methods, using digital media, strengthening pedagogical interactions, and providing affective-spiritual support. The implementation of these actions further affects the learning process by increasing student involvement, material relevance, the quality of interaction, the productive use of technology, and the internalization of religious values. The impact of the change in the process is then re-evaluated and becomes the next material for reflection. Thus, reflection on professional development can be understood as the main driver in the cycle of PAI learning improvement, connecting teachers' professional experience, pedagogical decision-making, the implementation of actions, the evaluation of results, and the continuous improvement of practice.

The results of nonparticipant observations strengthened the interview data. In some PAI learning activities, researchers observed that teachers did not use only lecture methods but also combined them with group discussions, case analysis, problem-solving, student presentations, and digital media. In materials related to *muamalah* issues, for example, the discussion focuses on phenomena close to students' lives, such as digital transactions and contemporary economic practices. On other occasions, media in the form of short videos and digital materials are used as a stimulus to start discussions so that students do not only passively accept the teacher's explanation. Learning interactions also show opportunities for students to express opinions, ask questions, respond to friends' arguments, and connect religious values with daily life. In the affective-spiritual aspect, the researcher observed the strengthening of advice, personal dialogue, religious habituation, and regulation of the use of digital devices during learning. The findings indicate that reflection results in concrete changes in methods, technology use, communication patterns, and the support of values in learning practices.

Based on the overall data, it can be stated that reflecting on the professional development of PAI teachers contributes to improving the quality of learning by changing the pedagogical, digital, and affective-spiritual dimensions. In the pedagogical dimension, reflection encourages teachers to abandon dependence on one-way learning and develop more participatory, contextual, and problem-based methods. In the digital dimension, reflection directs teachers not to view technology only as a source of distraction, but to use it in a planned manner as a medium and source of learning. Meanwhile, in the affective-spiritual dimension, reflection strengthens teachers' awareness that the success of PAI does not stop at mastering the material, but includes internalizing values, forming attitudes, and students' ability to actualize religious teachings in daily life. Thus, the research data show a pattern in which reflection functions as an evaluative mechanism that connects teaching experience with learning improvement decisions, so that quality improvement does not occur as a spontaneous change but through a continuous process of evaluation, adaptation, implementation, and re-evaluation.

Table 1. The Contribution of Reflection on the Professional Development of PAI Teachers to the Quality of Learning

Subtheme of Findings	A Reflection on the Actualization	Empirical Indicators Found	Data Source	Contribution to Learning Quality
Variety of interactive and humanist learning methods	Use of PBL, case discussion, group learning, simulation, and contextual learning strategies	Students are more active in asking questions, discussing, delivering arguments, and connecting material with life problems	Interview of the Deputy Head of Curriculum and learning observation	Increase engagement, critical thinking, material relevance, and contextual understanding
Optimization of digital media integration	The use of short videos, digital materials, interactive modules, and digital devices as learning resources	Technology is used as a stimulus for discussion and a means of obtaining learning information, not just as a personal tool	Teacher interviews and learning observations	Supporting student involvement, variety of learning resources, and digital literacy in a religious context
Affective-spiritual strengthening	Personal dialogue, religious habituation, exemplary strengthening, and material association with daily behavior	Teachers provide a space for dialogue about students' problems, provide strengthening of values, and emphasize the implementation of religious teachings	Madrasah Head Interviews and Learning Observations	Strengthening the internalization of values, moral awareness, religious attitudes, and self-control of students
Contextualization of PAI material	Connecting the material of fiqh, faith, and morals with contemporary issues	Discussion of digital transactions, <i>paylater</i> , digital behavior, and adolescent life problems	Interviews and observations	Helping students understand the relevance of Islamic teachings to actual life
Improved learning interactions	Changing communication patterns from teacher dominance to	Increased opportunities for students to express their opinions, ask questions, and	Learning observation	Creating learning that is more participatory, humane, and responsive to the

dialogue and student participation	respond to arguments	needs of students
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Table 1 shows that the contribution of reflection on professional development does not rest on a single indicator but is formed through the relationships among several changes in teacher practice. A variety of methods, the use of technology, contextualization of materials, interaction patterns, and affective-spiritual reinforcement are complementary components in shaping the quality of PAI learning. The most important finding is that reflection not only results in technical innovations, such as changing methods or the use of digital media, but also influences teachers' orientation toward understanding students' needs and PAI learning objectives. Changes in methods strengthen student engagement; the use of technology expands learning resources and experiences; contextualization makes religious material more relevant; Meanwhile, humanist communication and spiritual coaching strengthen the internalization of values. Therefore, the overall data interpretation shows that the main contribution to professional development reflection lies in the formation of PAI learning that is more participatory, contextual, technology-adaptive, and oriented towards value formation, rather than solely on improving cognitive achievement.

Discussion

The study's findings show that the actualization of professional reflection among PAI teachers in Madrasah occurs through three interlocking patterns: individual reflection through post-learning journals, collegial reflection through the teacher community, and action-based reflection through PTK. This pattern corroborates Purwanto et al. (2023), who found that reflective practice improves pedagogical competence and encourages innovative and creative learning, and Mulyana et al. (2023), who place professional development as an instrument for improving PAI teachers' competence. This finding also aligns with Latuapo (2023) on the importance of structured professional development for madrasah teachers. The difference is that previous research tended to discuss reflection, training, and professionalism as separate domains, whereas this study's findings show their interconnectedness as cycles. Theoretically, reflection is therefore better understood as a connecting mechanism between teaching experience, collegial learning, improvement actions, and ongoing evaluation in the professional practice of PAI teachers in urban madrasahs.

The contribution of reflection to a variety of interactive and contextual methods also expands on the findings of the cutting-edge literature. Sholeh et al. (2024) show that group discussions, project-based learning, technology integration, and the relevance of materials to daily life can increase PAI learning motivation. Rahmah et al. (2025) found that PAI teachers develop contextual, student-centered teaching materials, while Muslih et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of teachers' experiences in translating religious values into learning practices. The findings in madrasahs align with the literature because teachers use contemporary issues, such as digital transactions, as contexts for discussion. However, this study identifies an element that has not been prominent in previous studies: reflection as a pedagogical foundation before choosing a method. The practical implication is that method innovation should not be applied to follow trends, but rather based on a reflective diagnosis of learners' responses, needs, difficulties, and characteristics, identified through systematic and collaborative learning experiences.

In the digital dimension, the study's findings show that reflection encourages teachers to shift technology from a source of distraction to a directed pedagogical tool.

These results are consistent with Reksiana et al. (2024), who emphasized the need to expand PAI teachers' digital literacy, and with Susanti et al. (2024), who demonstrated the relevance of digital and social media for religious learning innovation. Mintasih et al. (2024) found that technology integration improves accessibility and interactivity, although the competence to create interactive content remains an obstacle. The findings on the use of video and digital materials in Madrasah are supported by Hamdi et al. (2024) and Jennah et al. (2025), who highlight the benefits of digital modules and videos for the PAI learning experience. The difference is that this study shows that the decision to use technology is born after a practical evaluation, not as the goal of innovation itself. Theoretically, digital competence should be situated within the framework of reflective pedagogy, rather than understood solely as technical skills in the use of devices.

The findings regarding the strengthening of the affective-spiritual dimension show that the quality of PAI learning in Madrasah does not stop at cognitive involvement and understanding, but also directs students toward the internalization of values, moral dialogue, religious habituation, and self-control. These findings align with those of Akhyar et al. (2024), who show the leadership role of PAI teachers in shaping the discipline of religious practice through habituation and spiritual guidance. Firdaos et al. (2026) also emphasized that the spiritual competence of madrasah teachers includes the dimensions of morals and religious attitudes that can be measured. Meanwhile, Ritonga et al. (2026) show that the digital competence of PAI teachers is also shaped by value-based goals rather than solely by technical demands. The suitability lies in the teacher's position as a pedagogical and moral actor. The novelty of this research lies in the finding that professional reflection bridges pedagogical and digital adaptation with an affective-spiritual orientation, so that the modernization of learning need not reduce the normative and transformative character of religious education.

When compared as a whole, previous literature tends to capture professional development, reflective practice, digital innovation, learning motivation, and character building through relatively separate research paths. Purwanto et al. (2023) focus on reflective practices, Mulyana et al. (2023) on professional development, Reksiana et al. (2024) on digital literacy, Sholeh et al. (2024) on learning motivation, while Akhyar et al. (2024) emphasize the formation of religious practices. This study brings together these dimensions in one empirical configuration: individual reflection yields a diagnosis, collegial reflection expands alternative solutions, PTK or pedagogical actions test improvements, and changes in methods, digital media, interactions, and value assistance contribute to the quality of learning. This novelty can be formulated as a model of PAI's transformative professional reflection cycle. His theoretical contribution is to expand the concept of reflection from personal evaluative activities to a multilevel mechanism that connects professional development with pedagogical, digital, and affective-spiritual transformation in the urban madrasah ecosystem in a sustainable manner.

In practice, the research findings imply that madrasahs should build an institutionalized reflection ecosystem rather than leaving reflection entirely to individual teacher habits. Post-learning journals can be linked to academic supervision, collegial forums, cross-generational digital mentoring, and PTK, so that classroom problems become part of a documented improvement agenda. These implications align with Rahmah et al. (2025), who highlight the importance of creativity, collaboration, and systematic evaluation, and with Ritonga et al. (2026), who emphasize institutional support in developing PAI teachers' digital competencies. Jennah et al. (2025) also show that media innovation affects engagement when pedagogically integrated. The impact of this research is the availability of an empirical basis for madrasahs to design professional

development that is oriented towards practice change, not just training participation. Although the findings are contextual and not intended for statistical generalization, the model has analytical transferability for urban madrasahs with relatively comparable learning characteristics and challenges.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the most important lesson from the reflection on the professional development of PAI teachers is that the improvement in the quality of learning does not occur automatically through teachers' participation in professional development programs, but rather through teachers' ability to process their teaching experience into a continuous cycle of evaluation and improvement. Reflection is actualized through individual reflection, collegial reflection, and scientific action through PTK, which further encourages learning changes in the pedagogical, digital, and affective-spiritual dimensions. The strength and scientific contribution of this research lies in the formulation of PAI's transformative professional reflection cycle model, which expands the understanding of reflection from personal evaluation activities to a multilevel mechanism that connects professional experience, problem diagnosis, peer collaboration, corrective action, and re-evaluation to produce more participatory, contextual, technology-adaptive, and value-internalized learning. In practice, the findings affirm the importance of madrasahs institutionalizing reflection journals, collegial forums, academic supervision, digital competency support, and PTK as a professional development ecosystem. However, this study was limited to a case study design in madrasahs, with a small number of informants and a qualitative approach, so the findings were not intended to be statistically generalized. The next research is suggested to use multicase studies on madrasahs with different characteristics, involving students' perspectives more broadly, and combining qualitative and quantitative or longitudinal approaches to examine the relationship between the intensity of professional reflection, changes in teacher competence, learning engagement, academic achievement, digital literacy, and students' affective-spiritual development more comprehensively.

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