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ABSTRACT

Islamic education (IE) is currently receiving increased attention and under-going major changes at the international level. A few studies have investigated the structured professional development programmes provided to IE teachers. However, the area of autonomous IE teacher professional learning continues to be under-researched. Based on Al-Zarnuji's framework of lifelong learning, the authors interviewed IE teachers to investigate the practices, attitudes, and influencing factors regarding IE teacher professional learning in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This study shows that IE teachers are eager to engage in teacher-driven learning experiences. The directions for the IE teachers' intended growth are mainly influenced by contemporary advancements in the field of education. The findings of this study highlight how IE teachers' professional learning capitalises on the Islamic concept of lifelong learning and thereby opens a promising route for their effective growth to meet the high demand for skilled IE teachers in the UAE.

KEYWORDS
Islamic education; teachers; professional learning; UAE

Introduction

This study aimed to investigate the high school Islamic education (IE) teachers' professional learning practices and factors that influence these practices. Islamic teachings consider the pursuit of individual growth as a sacred and lifelong duty. This pursuit for increasing one's knowledge, wisdom, and skill is considered a Muslim's compulsory duty as indicated in the Prophetic saying '*Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim*'. However, there appear to be major challenges in the professional development opportunities available for IE teachers. The lack of customised professional growth opportunities for IE teachers has been stressed as a major obstacle for the teaching and learning of IE internationally. For example, following a review of the development programmes for IE teachers in Europe and the United States in a Brookings analysis paper, Berglund (2015) made several recommendations, the first of which relates to the establishment of training programmes for high school IE teachers in a country's higher education system. Recently, Sahin (2018) endorsed a similar recommendation, suggesting an urgent need to overcome the pedagogical challenges faced by Islamic schools in Europe through the establishment of specialist training colleges for IE teachers. Similarly, Abdalla, Chown, and Abdullah (2018) found that the pedagogical approaches of Islamic study teachers in Australia needed substantial development. A similar lack of growth opportunities for IE teachers is found in the UAE despite the development of an effective and relevant IE curriculum (Bakali, Alhashmi, and Memon 2018). The increasing demand for IE teacher development opportunities, combined with the advancements in knowledge production and learning accessibility calls for the exploration of 'professional learning' as a possible means to meet this demand. The investigation of the tenets of the Islamic learning process reveals several commonalities – continuity, purposefulness, autonomy, perseverance, mastery, and application between the concepts of *ta'līm* (learning) and professional learning.

The theoretical framework utilised in this study is derived from the Islamic concept of *ta'līm* (learning), mentioned in Al-Zarnuji's (d. 1223 CE) *Ta'līm al-Muta'allim-Ṭarīq at-Ta'-allum* (Instruction of the Student: The Method of Learning) (Al-Zarnuji 2003). Al-Zarnuji's treatise provides an authentic Islamic pedagogical framework regarding the processes of learning. This treatise was the primary reference for this study as it is recognised as one of the first written works on education in the Islamic tradition. It is not intended to be an exhaustive framework but is an exemplary text that reflects the features of the learning in the Islamic tradition. Al-Zarnuji's work focused on the learning process rather than the teaching methods. This approach differentiates him from previous Muslim authors on the subject of IE. Cook and Malkawi (2010) noted that in addition to the education of children, Al-Zarnuji's work discusses adult education. The features of *ta'līm* based on Al-Zarnuji's work are as follows:

- *The Obligatory Nature*: In the chapter, '*Nature and Merit of Knowledge and Learning*', Al-Zarnuji (2003, 2) argued that the learners are required to seek knowledge relating to the work they are engaged in as whatever leads to the fulfilment of duty is in itself a duty.
- *Continuity*: The chapter '*The Time for the Acquisition of Knowledge*' (Al-Zarnuji 2003, 37) refers to the notion that a Muslim is required to institutionalise learning as a daily form of worship throughout their life.
- *Autonomy*: The treatise refers to how responsibility is placed upon the learner to select the branches of learning, the teacher and the companions with whom they will conduct their learning. Owing to the critical importance of these selections, Al-Zarnuji (2003) recommends seeking counsel from knowledgeable scholars while making these decisions. The application of such a level of learner freedom, based on careful selection criteria, has the potential to ensure that the learning process becomes highly purposeful.
- *Purposefulness*: In the chapter *'The Purpose of Study'*, Al-Zarnuji (2003, 6) indicates that the learning endeavour is mainly constructed based on the learner's intention.
- *Perseverance*: Al-Zarnuji (2003) emphasised the requirement of hard work and the dedication of ample time to master the learned knowledge. He considered the qualities of high ambition and industriousness as crucial for knowledge acquisition.
- *Mastery*: This concept states that the learner should aim to achieve a deep understanding of their chosen subject and gradually attain a firm grasp of the material by exerting themselves efficiently without bypassing or overlooking any knowledge. The means for achieving mastery includes the application of intelligence, reflection, and repetition. Al-Zarnuji also recommends the learning methods of discussion, debate, and inquiry with fairness, circumspection, and deliberation. To comprehend the subtle matters of knowledge, the learner needs to accustom themselves to long periods of reflection. He states that the comprehension of a topic matters more than memorising the subject matter or reading numerous books.

One drawback to the work of Al-Zarnuji (2003) is that there is little discussion on the importance of the application of learned knowledge. However, one can find that the aspect of the application is extensively discussed in many other Islamic traditional texts such as 'O Son!' by al-Ghazali (d. 1111). The abovementioned features of *ta'līm* (learning) derived from the Islamic philosophy of education have the potential to enrich the conceptualisation of professional learning, particularly for IE teachers.

Despite their interchangeable use, there are clear distinctions between the concepts of *professional learning* and *professional development*. The conventional view of teacher development is limited to the formal provisions for teacher growth. Some conventional teacher development activities include conducting formal workshops or courses that are mostly delivered in ways that may unintentionally limit teachers' choices and interactions. Akiba and Liang (2016) argued that the one-size-fits-all programmes provided by external professional development providers are ineffective as they do not allow for contextually in-depth communications and discussions focused on achieving student

learning. Professional learning is accomplished through the informal means of growth that considers teacher agency, including the different ways teachers use to facilitate students' learning in schools (Reich, Rooney, and Boud 2015; Harcourt and Jones 2016). Professional learning is nowadays used by researchers and practitioners to suggest an alternative conceptualisation that points to a shift in the attitudes and behaviours towards teacher growth. Teacher-centred professional learning activities are found to be more effective than regular professional development activities such as training programmes and university courses (Akiba and Liang 2016). Furthermore, informal teacher-centred professional learning allows for opportunities for the development of 'knowledge of practice' in a way that integrates theory and practice, and this, in turn, may positively impact student achievement (Baumfield 2016).

The UAE is a relatively young country that was founded 49 years ago by a leader who placed great emphasis on quality education. Education ranks top on UAE's list of priorities, and teacher growth has been an area of emphasis across both public and private schools in the country's capital, Abu Dhabi. The fact that UAE has made IE a mandatory school subject for all Muslim students highlights the importance of Islam in the UAE culture, tradition, and educational policy. The IE curriculum was developed by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and is taught across all public and private schools in the UAE as a stand-alone subject. A total of 90–180 minutes is allocated weekly to IE, depending on the type of school, grade level, and education stream (Bakali, Alhashmi, and Memon 2018). This study builds on the concept of *ta'līm* (learning) and the findings of recent research regarding teacher-centred professional learning practices. The study aims to investigate the professional learning practices of teachers with a specific focus on teachers who teach IE in both public and private high schools in Abu Dhabi. Further, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

(1) How is professional learning currently practised by IE teachers?
(2) What are the professional learning practices desired by IE teachers?
(3) What are the factors that influence IE teacher-centred professional learning practices?

Methodology

This study explored the professional learning practices of IE teachers and attempted to identify the factors that promoted these practices. A phenomenological approach was utilised to investigate the teachers' conscious experiences of their life-world (Merriam 2009). Individual semi-structured phenomenological interviews were used for collecting information for this study (Kvale and Brinkmann 2007; Seidman 2013). Semi-structured interviews were utilised as they allow for responding to the situation at hand and generate new ideas on the topic (Merriam 2009). The interviews were conducted to obtain deeper insights into the participants' personal experiences related to professional learning.

Context

This study was conducted in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, a multicultural area that accommodates residents of over 200 nationalities. We identified nine schools that represented different geographic locations within the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Out of these nine schools, six were public schools, and the remaining three were private schools. A combination of both private and public schools was chosen to provide a wider contextual and educational perspective regarding the subject of IE.

Private schools differ significantly from government schools in multiple aspects. The private schools selected for this study adopt an international curriculum in which IE is taught for a total of 90 minutes every week. There is a high emphasis on English language education within these private schools. Additionally, two of the three private schools had an international student community with a significant percentage of non-Muslim students. The public schools had a majority of Emirati and Muslim students and allocated a total of 180 minutes weekly to IE. The same IE curriculum is taught in both private and public schools.

Study participants

The participants of this study were 15 high-school IE teachers (male as well female teachers) from Abu Dhabi. While the IE teachers are competent in the Islamic studies discipline and know the content of their subject matter thoroughly, they do not necessarily hold a degree in IE. The participants were experienced in teaching IE to students of different grade levels, and the duration of their professional experience ranged from five to 25 years.

Materials

We developed a guide for conducting semi-structured interviews. In the interviews, we asked 14 questions to the participants regarding three key areas: *the teachers' perception of their professional learning needs, their perception of available professional learning programmes, resources, and growth opportunities, and their perceptions of contextual factors that promote effective professional learning.* These questions aimed at stimulating the participants' reflection on their professional learning practices and exploring the factors that motivated them to undertake these practices. The questions also prompted the teachers to explain the opportunities and challenges regarding the pursuit of growth. All 14 questions were asked to all the participants for the data to be comparable.

Procedure

The first researcher conducted the semi-structured interviews between 4 November 2017 and 9 May 2018. Potential selective perception was avoided by scheduling sufficient time between the interviews for early continuous analysis and reflection (Litosseliti 2003). The length of the interviews was between 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, except for the one that was conducted via Skype. The interviews were conducted in the participants' native language (Arabic) to eliminate the problems caused by a potential language barrier. Participation was voluntary on the part of the participants. The consent forms were signed by the participants before the interviews to ensure the participants' anonymity and confidentiality. After obtaining the participants' permission, their interviews were audio recorded to create an accurate record of their narratives, allowing for a completely validated and analysed transcription. As three teachers refused to be audio-recorded, their interview transcripts were typed from hand-written notes taken during the interviews.

Data analysis

Analysis was conducted during and after the interviews by using a content analysis approach. Content analysis is used 'for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use' (Krippendorff 2004, 18). First, the two researchers read the transcripts multiple times and familiarised themselves with the content. Subsequently, they independently developed codes within each theme to create a draft of a codebook through a process of open coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The first researcher revisited the drafts after two months to compare the discrepancies between the two drafts and synthesised a single codebook. The content was coded afterwards through a reiterative process, and the data were finally validated through member checking (Creswell 2007).

Findings

The findings of this study are presented below under the following three categories that correspond to the research questions: (1) current IE teacher growth experiences, (2) professional learning experiences desired by IE teachers, and (3) factors that influence IE teacher professional learning.

Current growth opportunities

The practices described by the participants included teacher–teacher interaction, coaching by Western educators, and professional development programmes planned by the MoE. First, learning through teacher–teacher interaction took place in the forms of classroom visits and teacher conversations that often occurred during informal meetings. Teachers exchanged classroom visits across classes and schools. The teachers interviewed in this study have been assigned pseudonyms (P1 to P15) to protect their identity. One of the benefits of these visits was shared by P1:

> After we attend IE classes in other schools, we obtain new ideas. We get excited to implement these new ideas in our classes.

Several participants indicated that they also benefit from visiting classrooms of teachers who teach other subject areas. However, the opportunities for observing colleagues' teaching are hindered by time constraints and scheduling conflicts. Therefore, most teacher–teacher interactions occur in weekly meetings and during teacher prep time. The teachers discuss teaching strategies and the development of assessments or share worksheets and lesson plans. Some teachers held such conversations about teaching the IE curriculum through WhatsApp groups, as described by P4.

Second, many IE teachers discussed professional learning by interacting with their Western colleagues. The skills obtained by the IE teachers through these discussions include lesson planning, developing teaching strategies, differentiation, and classroom management. Many participants mentioned that they particularly liked the learning approach that evolved through modelling, implementation, coaching, and feedback, as described below:

> The colleague teacher supported me all the time. At first, she taught me the [teaching] strategy. She then asked me to practise the strategy. After that, I selected the lesson and she assisted me in the lesson planning. She observed and gave me feedback about my teaching. Her goal [for me] was not to get a certificate but to actually implement [the novel strategy] (P11).

Third, when asked about the professional development opportunities tailored to IE, the participants pointed out the orientation session that followed the release of the new curriculum or curriculum development task forces that involved a few IE teachers. Additionally, during the academic year 2017–2018, the MoE introduced a professional development programme wherein the training materials were shared with the programme coordinators. The coordinators held the responsibility of delivering the sessions to the teachers in their schools during the 'professional development week'. The participants had conflicting opinions about this programme, and as the programme had started recently, at the time of this study, it was early to evaluate the participants' experiences.

Conventional professional development programmes were often provided in schools in the form of weekly training sessions or biannual professional development weeks. Most teachers expressed a negative perception towards these teacher training programmes due to their unfavourable characteristics. As the medium of instruction of such programmes is primarily English, the IE teachers emphasised the importance of receiving training in their native language (Arabic). P3 voiced his concern: *'the professional development programmes are often delivered completely in English. Once the programme was over, the teachers would look at me and ask, "what did they say"?'* Schools often choose to offer professional development programmes in English because of the convenience of identifying effective professional development programmes in English. While the translation was sometimes provided to the teachers, the intended meaning often got lost, and the teachers would not get a chance to discuss their ideas directly with the trainer. The training was described to be focused on general education theory with little to no room for practice or application of this theory, and the trainers seemed to be unaware of the context of the teachers' practical field. The participants stressed that they would prefer programmes that provided them with applicable teaching strategies, rather than sessions with a theoretical focus that was disconnected from their daily practices and students' needs.

Desired professional learning: teachers seek autonomy, empowerment, and choice

The participants emphasised their need for autonomy and empowerment in several ways. They stated that they wanted their growth experiences to be driven by themselves. The participants also believed that participation in professional development programmes needed to be voluntary rather than compulsory. For example, P8 wished to be exposed to new ideas but wanted to be left alone afterwards to learn on her own: *'I like to be exposed to new ideas. Once I know about these [ideas], I can search [more information] myself, read, and watch YouTube videos to learn how to implement these ideas'*. To ensure that autonomous collaborative professional learning practices flourish, the participants explained that it is crucial to have the support of their leadership in the forms of allocation of time for professional learning and the provision of suitable meeting rooms. The availability of online platforms for IE teachers to exchange learning materials and resources was also seen as an important way for autonomous growth experiences as one of the main challenges faced by IE teachers was the scarcity of materials that supported IE teaching and learning.

The participants repeatedly described the best learning experiences as those that were obtained from practitioners and teachers working in their field. They preferred teacher-facilitated learning experiences because *'teachers know students' needs very well'* (P7), *'the teacher knows best the needs of their colleagues'* (P10), and *'teachers are the best experts in teaching the adopted [IE] curriculum'* (P3). Preferred formats for such learning experiences included observation of colleagues' teaching in classrooms followed by teacher discussions, brainstorming sessions aimed at finding solutions to common obstacles, and the sharing of effective tried and tested teaching strategies. The participants preferred these types of teacher-led sessions because they revolved around their unique needs and challenges and also included the sharing of practical-learned lessons. The meetings organised for public school IE teachers and facilitated by the learning support specialists chosen by the MoE were considered highly effective by the participants. They formed this opinion because such meetings offered a venue for teachers from different schools to meet, pose questions, raise concerns, and receive expert advice from colleagues and specialists in a teacher-driven context.

The participants disliked being forced to attend the common pre-planned professional development programmes. Rather, they requested to be able to select and attend the programmes that best suited their needs and interests. They expressed their desire for the programmes to be well contextualised in the subject matter (e.g. IE), be comprehensive in nature to facilitate the connection of the learned materials with the practical experiences in IE classrooms, be explicit about the nuances of the teaching strategies, and include practical tips for the learned knowledge and skills to be put into practice.

To achieve this objective, the participants suggested that a training needs assessment should be centrally conducted before offering professional development programmes. For instance, P10 suggested that, *'every teacher should identify their needs for courses and workshops. In this way, the offered courses and programmes would be designed to meet the common needs'*. Consequently, the offered programmes need to be different for different teachers, as stated by (P11): *'the training programmes should be levelled. When we have an outstanding teacher [attending a programme], they should not be taking a course in which they have more knowledge about [the topic] than the trainers.*

Factors influencing professional learning: a rapidly changing context

The first group of the factors influencing professional learning include the demands of the UAE's IE curriculum and the student complaints of boredom. The UAE's IE curriculum poses several challenges that, in turn, motivate teachers to find ways to overcome these challenges. Some of these challenges are numerous teaching strategies, an excess of learning material resembled in three thick textbooks for each grade level, and comprehensive external final exams. Many teachers also believed that to be able to teach the IE curriculum, they needed to be well prepared to utilise the teaching strategies mandated by the MoE. Some participants described the IE textbook to be suitable for university students as it is

complex and requires advanced teaching skills that are above the competencies of many high school IE teachers. Several private school teachers indicated that the students found the textbook boring and difficult to understand because, although it is written in their mother tongue, many students have poor Arabic language comprehension skills (P2, P10). This is because they lack basic literacy skills (P6, P10), have insufficient vocabulary (P12), and are not interested in reading (P10). A few participants shared that IE can be a rigid subject and that teachers need to make it more appealing for the students.

The teachers' interest in continuous professional learning was partially driven by their desire to offer their students engaging and relevant learning experiences. Several participants expressed their concern about the stereotype of the IE subject perceived as uninteresting. For example, P3 stated the following:

> I, as a teacher, want to appear competent in front of my students. I want to prove that there are no competency issues with regard to the Islamic education teachers, contrary to the stereotypical view held by the administrators and the [education] inspectors.

The second factor that influenced the professional learning of teachers is the technology advancements. Regarding technology for students, the participants argued that the generation they teach is the *'technology generation, and students have mobile phones and iPad devices in their hands all the time, and we need to utilise these [devices] effectively'* (P7). The participants were concerned about their digital literacy skills. The following two quotations reflect the level of this concern: *'I wish that every [IE] teacher acquires digital skills. We are no less than the foreign teachers!'* (P4).

> The [digital] skills of the students are higher than those of the teacher. The students look at the teacher with pity because the IE teacher does not know anything about technology. The [IE] teacher is in a different world than that of the rest of society, and this is truly a shock to me! (P11, IE Subject Coordinator).

Several participants linked the need for technology integration in the IE curriculum with the need for IE teachers to adopt 21st-century skills and master the English language to have access to more resources. Finally, the demand for fostering the attitude of tolerance in IE classrooms was influential in driving and shaping teacher professional learning practices. The need for countering extremism was expressed by many private school teachers. For example, P3 noted, *'Some parents are fearful that the IE subject might lead students to misunderstand Islam. You know how some people fear possible extremism'*. Similarly, many teachers, when describing the qualities necessary for the IE teacher, stated that they *'need to be open-minded'* (P4, P7, and P11), *'accepting of other opinions and willing to change their opinion'* (P4). P4 explained, *'The IE teacher should accept others' opinions irrespective of their religion and sect. This is true integration'*. Tolerance was a recurring theme stressed by the participants. In the following statement, P9 emphasised the need to include an '*element of tolerance*' in any professional learning programme:

> The professional learning programme should address the need of the IE teacher to be knowledgeable of other cultures and accepting of the other. Many IE teachers … we carry a [noble] message but [express it] in a wrong way, and this harms more than it benefits. IE teachers need to be made aware that they need to address the tolerance message of Islam appropriately. This training can be conducted by posing questions and training the teachers on how to address these questions.

Several teachers discussed the potential risks and impacts of sharing inaccurate information. P10 noted, '*the teacher needs to pay attention to every word they say, especially when students ask questions that are related to international political affairs'*. Similarly, P12 shared his opinion that *'sharing wrong information in IE (classes) has disastrous consequences'*. P9 echoed that *'if an Arabic teacher makes a mistake, then it's ok. However, as the IE teacher shapes students' ways of thinking, their mistakes are very harmful*'. P4 warned that the results of sharing such wrong information is that *'the student will either become too close-minded or will oppose their religion and hate it'*.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that IE teachers are interested in continuous growth and seek opportunities that are in line with the notion of professional learning. The professional development opportunities offered to IE teachers were found to be typically limited as they were misaligned with the teachers' requirement, offered generic information, were mandatory, and had a rigid structure. The investment in effective IE teacher growth infrastructure remains insufficient and does not parallel the major investment sanctioned for developing the UAE's IE curriculum. This is consistent with the traditional trend in the area of IE internationally, where curriculum development projects are emphasised more than teacher professional learning opportunities (Memon 2011). It also resonates with the conclusion of Bakali, Alhashmi, and Memon (2018) regarding the necessity of consulting with IE teachers in the UAE to develop practical, accessible, and relevant development programmes before delivering the programmes. The teachers' emphasis on learner-centred growth opportunities and their thirst for autonomy is supported by the Self-Determination Theory, which indicates that the three innate psychological needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness enhance intrinsic self-motivation (Ryan and Deci 2000). Effective venues of professional learning programmes can engage learners to empower *halaqah* structures (traditional Islamic pedagogy in the form of an oral circle of learning) (Ahmed 2014) as well as facilitate curriculum development activities and create communities of enquiry (Baumfield 2016). Teacher empowerment improves the impact of the teacher on student learning (Harris and Jones 2017) and is consistent with the key features of *ta'līm* (learning) as implied in al-Zarnuji's work (2003). The critical role of school leadership needs to be reoriented so that it undertakes a collaborative role of supporting, energising, and facilitating IE (Harris and Jones 2017).

This study showed that the factors that influenced the teachers' interest and practice of professional learning were mostly reactive to students' modes of learning, contemporary advancements in the fields of education, and technological advancements. The teachers were determined to flip the stereotypical image of IE classes being described as boring. This is consistent with AlZaboun's (2014) observations of Abu Dhabi IE classes that he described as 'dry' and 'attempting to fill the students' brains with facts', resulting in students disliking IE classes. A similar environment of IE classes has also been found in other countries such as Australia, where students of grades 10–12 reported that the learning experience is not enjoyable as their role is limited to that of listening and that the teaching approach was not practical (Abdalla, Chown, and Abdullah 2018). IE teachers in Abu Dhabi were pragmatic in their desire for professional learning to be primarily practice-focused. This is different from the views of IE teachers in Canada, who were mostly interested in professional learning opportunities related to an Islamic philosophy (Memon 2011), as well as that of those in Australia who expressed a need for professional learning to be grounded in an Islamic worldview (Abdalla, Chown, and Abdullah 2018). Between the commonly employed approaches akin to theology taught in seminaries (Bakali, Alhashmi and Memon 2018) and the students' expectations of active learning, along with the trend to digress from rote learning and memorisation (Burton and Warner 2019), IE teachers face an urgent need to change according to the pedagogical benchmarks in other subject areas.

Conclusion

In summary, we have found that IE teachers in Abu Dhabi call for a shift from rigid professional development programmes towards self- and peer-guided professional learning. The current professional learning practices were found to have limited application and are not supported by common time, space, and resources that would grant momentum and sustainability to the teachers' learning. The teachers collectively want to be in charge of their development through the provision of programmes led by them. Accordingly, the teachers want to take the lead in deciding to enrol in programmes based on their individual needs. These modified programmes were expected by

teachers to lead to upgrading the teaching and learning of IE so that it is no less than other subject areas.

This study shows that IE teacher growth should be achieved through not only courses and training programmes but also dynamic and innovative forms that will enable individual teacher-driven learning, including conferences, forums, professional learning communities, websites, social media, and mentorships. The components of autonomy, application, and choice are essential components of the concept of *ta'līm* (learning) and should be established as essential criteria for IE teacher growth programmes designed by ministries, districts, and schools. Future studies will need to consider the particularities of facilitating IE teacher professional learning programmes. For example, how could schools balance the shift towards professional learning while address the need for guided professional development that aims at exposing IE teachers to essential frameworks and resources that, in turn, provoke new ideas and trigger further professional learning endeavours? What forms of professional learning does the subject area of IE lend itself to? What role do school leaders and the school middle management team play to facilitate effective venues for IE professional learning? What kind of professional learning can best impact student learning in IE? IE has suffered internationally from the scarcity of quality training programmes for its teachers. In this study, the teachers call for alternative platforms that empower and enable them to flourish at their own pace based on their needs and interests. This demand is of particular importance as the concept of professional learning is in line with the religious obligation among Muslims to continue learning, which leads to institutionalising IE professional learning practices and creating international platforms for these practices to flourish. This might lead to further development of IE teaching practices and collective teacher growth and enhance the professionalism of the field.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Notes on contributors

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