Article

Transforming Islamic Education through Lesson Study (LS): A Classroom-Based Approach to Professional Development in Southern Thailand

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Abstract: Private Islamic schools in Southern Thailand face significant challenges, particularly in adhering to national educational standards, which impacts students' academic outcomes. Most Islamic Studies teachers lack formal pedagogical training, resulting in a teaching approach that often fails to engage students effectively. This study employed participatory action research (PAR) involving 32 Islamic Studies teachers across 10 schools. The research was structured around the four phases of PAR: establishing relationships, collaborative design, implementation through LS and Open Approach, and reflective assessment. The implementation of Lesson Study and Open Approach led to significant improvements in teaching practices, shifting from traditional teacher-centered methods to learner-centered approaches that emphasized critical thinking, self-directed learning, and the integration of ICT. This study demonstrates that adapting LS to the context of Islamic education can enhance professional development for teachers and improve educational outcomes. This approach could serve as a model for broader educational reforms in the region.

Keywords: lesson study; open approach; Islamic studies; teacher development; participatory action research; Islamic schools; southern Thailand

1. Introduction

Islamic education plays a fundamental role in shaping the moral, spiritual, and academic development of students. To achieve these goals, professional development for Islamic Studies teachers is essential, equipping them with the pedagogical skills needed to effectively integrate Islamic values with modern educational practices. Private Islamic schools in Thailand, particularly in the southern provinces (Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat), are central to this effort [1,2]. These schools, favored by Muslim parents, offer a curriculum that balances religious and general education, appealing to those who seek both academic success and strong moral and religious foundations for their children [3–5]. However, despite their popularity and expansion, these schools face significant challenges in managing educational quality. Concerns arise regarding their adherence to the Basic Education Core Curriculum standards, as students from private Islamic schools consistently perform below the national average on the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) [6]. This gap in performance reflects systemic challenges, particularly in the quality of teaching, which needs to be addressed through enhanced professional development models. Addressing these challenges requires enhanced educational strategies and resources to improve the quality of education in private Islamic schools in Thailand.

Past studies have identified several crucial factors affecting the quality of education management in Islamic schools in Southern Thailand. These include an overloaded

curriculum, insufficient teacher qualifications especially among Islamic Studies teachers, inadequate school management, and lack of resources and support [5,7,8]. The security situation in the region complicates matters, with frequent inspections and safety concerns affecting the well-being of students, teachers, and administrators [9,10]. Poverty and educational inequality are also significant challenges, with a higher proportion of poor students in the southern border provinces compared to the rest of the country [6].

The intrinsic connection between Islamic education and teacher professional development lies in the critical role teachers play in delivering the curriculum and shaping the moral, spiritual, and academic growth of students within Islamic schools [11]. Professional development directly impacts the quality of teaching, which in turn affects how effectively Islamic values and academic subjects are conveyed to students. This relationship underscores the importance of teacher quality as a critical area for further research and solution development in Islamic education. In the context of Islamic schools, particularly in Thailand, the need for enhanced teacher development is acutely evident. Many teachers in Islamic schools, particularly Islamic Studies teachers, are reported to lack formal pedagogical training and certification, a concern highlighted by several studies in the context of private Islamic education in Thailand [5,8]. This deficiency is compounded by limited professional development opportunities, a challenge exacerbated by the fact that Islamic schools, as private institutions, receive less government funding compared to public schools [12]. Professional development must focus on both pedagogical skills and the integration of Islamic values with modern educational practices to enable Islamic Studies teachers to meet the demands of both religious and academic excellence. By focusing on these teacher-related factors, Islamic schools can potentially achieve more effective educational outcomes. Enhanced professional development not only improves teaching quality but also better equips educators to integrate Islamic principles with modern educational practices [13]. This holistic approach to teacher development could lead to a more comprehensive education that prepares students for future academic and personal success, while maintaining a strong foundation in Islamic values and teachings.

The development of Islamic Studies teachers in Southern Thailand has been the focus of various governmental and educational initiatives, particularly in enhancing the competencies of teachers in private Islamic schools [14,15]. These efforts have included training programs, curriculum development, and short-term professional development opportunities aimed at improving the overall quality of education. However, a significant gap remains in the approach to teacher development, particularly in how these activities are implemented. Most of the existing programs are not classroom-based and do not integrate the day-to-day realities of teaching within the school environment [16]. This has led to criticism from educators who question the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of these development efforts [17–20]. In response to these concerns, there has been a growing interest in classroom-based teacher development models, such as the Japanese Lesson Study (LS), which emphasizes collaborative, reflective teaching practices within the classroom setting [21].

The Lesson Study model, rooted in Japanese educational culture, has been successfully adapted in Thailand, particularly in the teaching of mathematics [20]. Since its introduction in 2002 through the Mathematics Education Research Center at Khon Kaen University, LS has spread across the country, demonstrating its effectiveness in transforming teaching practices and improving student outcomes [17,18,22]. The model involves teachers working together to design lessons, observe each other's teaching, and engage in reflective discussions to refine their instructional strategies [23]. This collaborative process has been particularly successful in shifting the focus from traditional teacher-centered methods to more student-centered approaches that foster higher-order thinking skills. However, while LS has seen successful in improving the teaching of mathematics and science, the broader performance issues in private Islamic schools indicate that these methods have not been uniformly implemented, particularly in Islamic Studies. The application of LS in the context

of Islamic Studies remains largely unexplored, representing a significant research gap and an opportunity to innovate in the development of Islamic education.

This research seeks to address this gap by applying the Lesson Study model to the development of Islamic Studies teachers in private Islamic schools. The goal is to explore how the collaborative, reflective approach of LS can be adapted to the unique context of Islamic education, where teachers often face distinct challenges related to their training and the cultural and religious specificity of the curriculum [24]. By focusing on Islamic Studies, this research not only extends the application of LS beyond its traditional use in mathematics and science but also offers the potential to raise the quality of teaching in private Islamic schools. The significance of this study lies in its potential to transform teacher development in Islamic education by introducing a sustainable, classroom-based model that emphasizes continuous professional growth and student-centered learning [25,26]. If successful, this approach could serve as a model for broader educational reforms in the region, leading to improved educational outcomes and better preparation of students for both religious and general academic success. To achieve the knowledge objectives of this study, the study has set the following research goals: (1) to study the effects of applying the Lesson Study and Open Approach on Islamic Studies teachers in private Islamic schools, and (2) to propose a model for the professional development process of Islamic Studies teachers based on the Japanese Lesson Study concept.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1. Background of Islamic Private Schools in Thailand

Islamic private schools in Thailand, particularly in the southern provinces, are essential pillars of education and cultural preservation for the Muslim community. These schools have evolved from traditional educational institutions known as 'pondoks', which historically played a significant role in Southeast Asia's Islamic education system [27–30]. Originally, pondoks operated independently, focusing on providing religious education aimed at producing knowledgeable and virtuous Muslims who could practice their faith correctly. This historical foundation is deeply embedded in the local culture and religion, making these institutions integral to the community. However, the rise of Islamic schools in Thailand should also be understood within a broader global context. Across the world, there has been a significant increase in the establishment of Islamic schools, including in countries like the United States, Australia, Europe, and others, where Muslim communities seek to balance the integration of Islamic values with mainstream education [31]. These schools provide an environment where students can grow academically while maintaining a strong connection to their religious identity. This global trend mirrors the growth of Islamic schools in Thailand, where parents and communities similarly seek to provide an education that aligns with both religious and academic goals. The transformation of these traditional schools began in 1961 [1,5,32] when the Thai government mandated their registration, leading to significant changes between 1965 and 1968 as they were restructured into private Islamic schools. The Private Schools Act of 1983 further formalized their status, offering financial support to institutions that provided both general and Islamic religious education. This dual curriculum approach made these schools highly attractive to Muslim parents who sought a comprehensive education for their children, blending secular and religious studies. Today, there are 218 private Islamic schools in Thailand's five southern provinces, serving 176,421 students [15]. These schools offer a dual curriculum that includes subjects such as Quran, Hadith, Al-Aqeedah (Principles of Faith), Al-Fiqh (Religious Law), Attarik (Religious History), Al-Akhlaq (Ethics), Arabic, and Malay/Additional Arabic [33], alongside general education subjects including mathematics, science, Thai Language, Social Studies, English Language, Physical Education, and Arts. These subjects are designed to ensure that students meet the national educational standards and are adequately prepared for higher education and professional careers.

2.2. Islamic Education

Islamic education plays a critical role in shaping the moral, spiritual, and academic development of students in Thailand. As one of the primary vehicles for imparting religious values and ethical standards, Islamic education aims to foster students' understanding of Islamic principles, guiding them to live righteous lives based on these teachings. The Islamic Studies curriculum in Thailand's private schools adheres to the principles of the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 and incorporates additional guidelines to enhance religious education [34]. Islamic Studies teachers in Thailand are entrusted with the task of cultivating an in-depth understanding of Islamic teachings in their students. This includes fostering an adherence to Islamic principles as a framework for ethical decision-making, social interactions, and personal development [35]. However, many of these educators have been educated abroad in places such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. While these international experiences offer teachers deep religious insights, they may not adequately prepare them for the specific challenges of teaching in the Thai educational context, which emphasizes not only religious knowledge but also pedagogical skills tailored to diverse learning environments [8,36,37]. This gap can result in teaching practices that fail to engage students effectively or meet their diverse learning needs. Moreover, a considerable number of these teachers lack formal teaching qualifications and have limited access to ongoing professional development opportunities [37].

2.3. Teacher Professional Development

Teacher professional development (TPD) is a critical component in improving education quality, especially in contexts where there is a gap between pedagogical skills and subject knowledge, such as Islamic Studies in private schools in Thailand. A significant number of Islamic Studies teachers possess deep religious knowledge but may not have access to modern pedagogical techniques, which can limit classroom effectiveness in certain cases [8,36]. Additionally, some private Islamic schools face financial constraints that reduce access to continuous professional development opportunities, a challenge noted in specific regions like Southern Thailand [37]. To bridge these gaps, innovative approaches such as participatory action research (PAR) empower teachers to become active researchers in their own practice, enhancing their understanding of classroom dynamics and student needs [38]. Lesson Study (LS), which promotes collaboration among teachers who jointly plan, observe, and analyze lessons, leads to refined teaching strategies and fosters a culture of shared learning. Professional learning communities (PLCs), which foster collaboration and reflective practice among teachers, help them address challenges related to integrating religious content with contemporary educational methods. These approaches have been shown to enhance teacher competencies by fostering collaboration, reflection, and continuous improvement. These models focus on collaboration, technology integration, and reflective teaching practices, empowering teachers to improve both instruction and content delivery. Lesson Study [20,39], in particular, involves teachers collaboratively planning, observing, and analyzing classroom lessons, promoting continuous improvement through peer feedback and reflection. By adopting this model, Islamic schools can foster a culture of shared learning, where teachers refine their practices and better integrate Islamic values with modern pedagogy. Lesson Study's focus on collaborative learning leads into the next section, Lesson Study and Open Approach, where these methods will be explored further in the context of Islamic education to enhance both teacher effectiveness and student outcomes [40].

This pedagogical shift aligns with the current literature on professional development (PD), which emphasizes the need to equip teachers with strategies that help them transition from delivering content to fostering 21st-century skills in their students. According to Christopher, D. [41], professional development that focuses on competency-based education improves teachers' ability to engage students in meaningful learning experiences. Similarly, Darling-Hammond [42] argues that teacher professional development should focus on creating an environment where students take ownership of their learning, apply critical

thinking, and develop lifelong learning skills. These competencies are increasingly essential in modern education, especially with the rise of technology and digital learning platforms.

2.4. Lesson Study and Open Approach

Lesson Study (LS) has a rich historical background dating back to the Meiji Era (1868–1912), a period marked by Japan's modernization and educational reforms [43,44]. This era saw the fusion of Western educational practices with traditional Japanese pedagogy, leading to the development of LS as a structured approach to enhancing teaching and learning [45]. Over the decades, particularly in the mid-20th century, LS became more formalized, with educators documenting and sharing their experiences. This collaborative professional development practice involves teachers systematically examining their instructional methods to improve student learning outcomes. The approach has since become a cornerstone of Japanese educational practices and has been adopted by various countries seeking to improve their educational systems [23,46]. The process of LS is comprehensive and iterative, beginning with goal setting, where teachers identify specific teaching and learning objectives. This is followed by collaborative planning, where a group of teachers design a detailed lesson plan aimed at achieving these goals. One teacher then teaches the planned lesson while others observe, focusing on student engagement and understanding rather than the teacher's performance. Post-lesson, the teachers engage in reflective discussions to analyze the lesson's effectiveness, discuss student responses, and identify areas for improvement. The final step involves documenting and sharing the findings to contribute to the professional knowledge base. This structured yet flexible process emphasizes continuous improvement through collaboration, observation, and reflection, ensuring that teaching practices are continually refined to meet student needs [20,39,47]. The significance of LS lies in its ability to enhance teaching practices, foster professional collaboration, and maintain a student-centered focus [21]. By engaging in detailed planning, observation, and reflection, teachers develop more effective instructional strategies tailored to their students' needs [22]. However, successful implementation of LS requires strong school leadership support, a collaborative culture, ongoing professional development, sufficient time allocation, a focus on student learning, thorough documentation, and possibly external expertise [48–50]. When these factors are in place, LS can significantly enhance the quality of education, benefiting both teachers and students by creating a dynamic and supportive learning environment.

The Open Approach closely aligns with Lesson Study. In Lesson Study, teachers apply Open Approach methods in research lessons, gather data on student learning, and refine their teaching strategies based on observations and reflections [40]. The Open Approach teaching methods focus on creating a student-centered environment that encourages active participation, critical thinking, and creativity [51]. Key features include inquiry-based and collaborative learning, flexible adaptation to student needs, and reflective practice. Methods involve project-based learning, where students engage in interdisciplinary projects, and problem-based learning, which emphasizes real-world problem-solving. Hands-on activities, differentiated instruction, and the use of technology enhance learning by making it practical and tailored to individual needs. Experiential learning through field trips and simulations connects classroom lessons to real life. This approach boosts engagement, motivation, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills [52].

2.5. The Historical Implementation of Lesson Study in Islamic Schools in Southern Thailand

The historical implementation of Lesson Study in Islamic schools in Southern Thailand reflects the gradual adoption of a Japanese pedagogical approach within the region's educational framework. This method, introduced to Thailand in 2002 by Dr. Maitree Inprasitha [17,53], initially aimed to enhance mathematics education by shifting from traditional teacher-centered instruction to more collaborative and student-centered learning environments. The success of Lesson Study in improving mathematics teaching set the stage for its expansion to other subjects [20]. In 2004, the first open class for mathematics

teachers was held at the Pattani Majlis Agama Islam meeting hall, marking the introduction of Lesson Study to Southern Thailand. This was followed by workshops and additional open classes in subsequent years, including a significant event in 2015 that focused on empowering education in the southern border provinces through workshops targeting mathematics and science teachers at the College of Islamic Studies (CIS), Prince of Songkla University. The momentum continued to build, and by 2018 and 2019, open classes began to include science subjects as well [18]. However, it was not until 2023 that Lesson Study was officially extended to Islamic Studies, with an open class at Khampi Wittaya School in Yala Province and later at Hatyai Wittayakarn in Songkhla Province, signaling a major milestone in the application of this approach to religious education. The culmination of these efforts occurred in 2024 with the first official open class for Islamic Studies teachers at the Islamic Science Demonstration School, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani. This landmark event saw participation from over 200 Islamic Studies teachers from 50 schools, demonstrating the widespread acceptance and significance of this pedagogical approach [54]. This historical context underpins the current research, which aims to further explore and refine the application of Lesson Study in Islamic Studies. By addressing the unique challenges faced by Islamic Studies teachers, particularly their lack of formal pedagogical training, this research seeks to adapt the successful strategies used in mathematics and science education to the context of Islamic Studies. The goal is to create a more student-centered, collaborative learning environment that aligns with both religious and academic objectives, ensuring that students receive a comprehensive education that prepares them for future success. Table 1 highlights key events in the historical implementation of Lesson Study in Islamic schools in Southern Thailand.

Table 1. Key events in the historical implementation of Lesson Study in Islamic schools in Southern Thailand.

Year	Event	Description
2002	Introduction of Lesson Study in Thailand	Dr. Maitree Inprasitha introduced the Lesson Study method in the northeastern region of Thailand, initially focusing on improving mathematics education.
2004	First Open Class in Southern Thailand	The first open class for mathematics teachers was held at the Pattani Majlis Agama Islam meeting hall, marking the introduction of Lesson Study to Southern Thailand.
2015	Empowerment Workshops for Southern Border Education	Workshops were held at the College of Islamic Studies (CIS), targeting mathematics and science teachers in the southern border provinces to enhance education.
2018	Expansion of Lesson Study to Science Subjects	Open classes began to include science subjects, reflecting the growing application of Lesson Study beyond mathematics in Southern Thailand.
2019	Continued Expansion of Lesson Study	Further open classes were held, continuing the expansion of Lesson Study to additional subjects, including science.
2023	Extension of Lesson Study to Islamic Studies	The first open class for Islamic Studies was held at Khampi Wittaya School in Yala Province and later at Hatyai Wittayakarn in Songkhla Province.
2024	First Official Open Class for Islamic Studies Teachers	A landmark event at the Islamic Science Demonstration School, Prince of Songkla University, Pattani, where over 200 Islamic Studies teachers from 50 schools participated.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

This research used participatory action research (PAR) divided into four phases [55,56]: (1) establishing relationships and shared goals, (2) designing the research collaboratively, (3) implementing the plan through Lesson Study and Open Approach methods, and

(4) assessing and revising the action plan. Data collection involved focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, capturing teachers' reflections throughout the process. This approach ensured active participation, continuous feedback, and iterative improvements, leading to a nuanced understanding of effective professional development practices for Islamic Studies teachers. Both emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives were integrated. The emic perspective was reflected in the researchers' close collaboration with teachers, gaining insights into their cultural and educational context. The etic perspective was applied through the use of structured models like Lesson Study, providing an external framework for professional development. This dual approach ensured a deeper understanding of both the specific challenges of Islamic education and broader educational theories [57]. Table 2 illustrates the research process.

Table 2. Research process.

Process	Action	Data Collection	Reflection
1. Establishing Relationships and Shared Goals	The first step involves building strong relationships between researchers and participants, ensuring a foundation of trust and collaboration.	Focus group discussions capture teachers' initial reflections and expectations.	Participants reflect on the clarity of roles, the degree of shared understanding, and the effectiveness of communication in establishing trust. Adjustments are made to ensure alignment and commitment.
2. Designing the Research Collaboratively	Teachers work together to develop a year-long collaborative plan based on Lesson Study guidelines. The collaborative planning process also involves reaching an agreement on the research approach, timelines, and roles. Teachers receive training on effective observation techniques, ensuring a focus on student engagement and learning outcomes throughout the year.	Focus group discussions capture insights into the collaborative planning process, agreement on objectives, and teachers' expectations for the year-long plan.	Reflection focuses on the effectiveness of collaboration during the planning phase, the alignment of lesson plans with identified goals, and any challenges faced in agreeing on the year-long plan.
3. Implementing the Plan Through Lesson Study and Open Approach Methods	The implementation follows four steps: (1) planning: teachers collaboratively create detailed lesson plans; (2) teaching: one teacher teaches while others observe; (3) observing: observers focus on student engagement and learning; (4) reflecting: teachers discuss the lesson's effectiveness and revise the plan as needed. Re-teaching occurs to refine the approach	Focus group discussions gather detailed reflections from teachers on the implementation, including observed challenges and successes during lessons.	Reflection centers on the effectiveness of the lesson delivery, the accuracy of observations, the impact on student engagement, and the success of any revisions made to lesson plans.
4. Assessing and Revising the Action Plan	Comprehensive reflection sessions evaluate the Lesson Study process. Teachers discuss strategies, challenges, and improvements.	In-depth interviews and focus group discussions assess the overall effectiveness of the action plan and gather suggestions for future improvements.	Reflection includes evaluating the overall success of the Lesson Study, identifying best practices and areas for improvement, and considering how the findings can be applied to future professional development.

3.2. Participants

The research participants comprised 32 Islamic Studies teachers from 10 private Islamic schools in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat Provinces in Southern Thailand; they all taught in the academic year 2022 (Semester 1: May–October 2022 and Semester 2: November–March 2023). Purposeful sampling [58,59] was used to select participants who met specific inclusion criteria: each teacher had more than three years of teaching experience, taught at least 10 periods per week, had a Bachelor's degree in Islamic Studies, and demonstrated a willingness to engage in the Lesson Study process. The group included

6 teachers from small schools (less than 499 students), 16 teachers from medium schools (500–1499 students), and 10 teachers from large schools (1500–2499 students) according to the school size as defined by the Ministry of Education [60]. Additionally, the participants were categorized by teaching level, with 15 teachers at the lower Islamic level (Ibtida'i), 8 at the middle Islamic level (Mutawassit), and 9 at the upper Islamic level (Sanawi). All participants held a bachelor's degree in Islamic Studies and had been teaching for 5 to 22 years. The exclusion criterion for the study was the voluntary withdrawal of participants from the research process. Table 3 provides an overview of the primary research participants.

Table 3. Primary research participants.

Category	Type	Count
School Size	Small (less than 499 students)	6
School Size	Medium (500–1499 students)	16
School Size	Large (1500–2499 students)	10
Islamic Level	Lower Islamic level (Ibtida'i)	15
Islamic Level	Middle Islamic level (Mutawassit)	8
Islamic Level	Upper Islamic level (Sanawi)	9
Teaching Experiences	3–5 Years	9
Teaching Experiences	6–10 Years	12
Teaching Experiences	Above 10 Years	11
Qualification	Bachelor's degree in Islamic Studies	32

3.3. Instruments and Analysis

The questions in the study were divided into two main categories. The first category focused on evaluating the outcomes and effectiveness of implementing Lesson Study in the schools, while the second category addressed the proposed process for developing a learner-centered professional development framework. This framework refers to a structured approach aimed at continuously enhancing teachers' pedagogical skills and reflective teaching practices through collaboration, observation, and iterative improvement, centered around student learning needs. The framework was designed to ensure that teachers receive ongoing support and are equipped to integrate Islamic values into modern educational practices, fostering a more learner-centered approach in the classroom.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, which provided comprehensive insights into teachers' experiences, professional growth, strategies for continuous improvement, and recommendations for enhancing professional development processes. This qualitative approach enabled researchers to gather detailed information directly from teachers, ensuring a thorough understanding of the implementation and its overall impact.

The study utilized Leonard's method, integrating Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology [61,62]. This methodical approach ensured a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the teachers' experiences and practices. Initially, the recorded data were transcribed verbatim and rigorously checked against the original recordings multiple times to identify preliminary issues. This step was crucial for maintaining data integrity and ensuring that the transcription accurately reflected the teachers' narratives and interactions during their implementation of Lesson Study and the Open Approach.

In the next step, the researcher immersed themselves in the transcribed data, reviewing them multiple times to gain a deep understanding of their meaning. Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns and themes within the data that were directly related to the study's objectives. This process involved coding the data to identify recurring themes, such as teachers' attitudes toward professional development, the effectiveness of collaborative teaching practices, and challenges in implementing learner-centered approaches. These themes were derived from recurring patterns and key statements made by participants, reflecting their perspectives on Lesson Study and Open Approach practices. This thematic

analysis facilitated the structured organization of data, making it easier to draw meaningful insights and connections. The study was conducted in Thai, and the quotations presented here are paraphrased translations rather than direct quotes to preserve the meaning while adapting the language for clarity.

Triangulation was employed by comparing multiple data sources, including interview transcripts, focus group discussions, and classroom observations, to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings [63]. This method of triangulation helped to cross-verify the data and provided a more comprehensive understanding of how the professional development framework was implemented in different contexts and by various teachers.

The subsequent steps involved a detailed examination of each identified issue, considering the specific meanings of words and phrases used by the participants. This phase aimed to uncover the underlying behaviors and attitudes of the teachers toward the professional development processes. By classifying the data according to the meanings that explained specific behaviors, the researcher gained a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors influencing the teachers' implementation of Lesson Study and the Open Approach.

This rigorous analytical process highlighted both challenges and successes, as well as potential areas for improvement in the professional development of Islamic Studies teachers in Thailand. Ultimately, the study provided valuable insights into developing a learner-centered professional development process, emphasizing collaborative and reflective teaching practices that enhance the effectiveness of Islamic Studies education.

3.4. Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was used by collecting data from multiple sources (interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations) to cross-verify the information. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with participants to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of the data. Additionally, a detailed audit trail was maintained to document the research process, including decisions made and actions taken during the study. These measures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the research [64].

3.5. Ethics in Human Research

The research adhered to strict ethical considerations throughout the process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the research objectives, procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by assigning codes to participants, with pseudonyms used to represent schools and teachers (e.g., S1 for School 1, T1 for Teacher 1). The study was conducted in full compliance with ethical guidelines as set forth by the Research Ethics Committee for Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education at Prince of Songkla University, Pattani campus, in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report (REC Number: psu.pn2-038/65). Any potential conflicts of interest or biases were disclosed, and efforts were made to minimize any potential harm to participants. These measures ensured the protection of participants' rights and well-being, upholding the integrity and ethical responsibility of the research.

4. Results

4.1. Evaluation of the PAR Process

This table aligns the research results with the four research processes, and providing a timeline for the activities, particularly in the implementation phase. The reflections in each phase highlight the continuous process of action and reflection that is central to the research methodology. Table 4 presents the PAR process and reflections for each phase.

Table 4. The PAR process and the reflection.

Process	Action	Reflection	Timeline
1. Establishing Relationships and Shared Goals	The first step involved building strong relationships between researchers and participants, ensuring a foundation of trust and collaboration.	(1) Creating a mutual understanding of shared goals: The study found that all Islamic Studies teachers agreed on the importance of changing teaching methods but were unsure how to proceed. They recognized the need to improve teaching methods and were willing to participate in the research process. (2) Making agreements on research objectives, methodologies, and expected outcomes: All schools agreed on two research goals: (1) apply the concepts of Lesson Study and Open Approach to develop Islamic education teachers and study the impact; (2) propose a Lesson Study model appropriate for Islamic education teachers in Southern Thailand.	July 2023 (Initial meetings and agreements)
2. Designing the Research Collaboratively	Teachers worked together to develop a year-long collaborative plan based on Lesson Study guidelines.	The participants collaboratively proposed a year-long development plan, which included (1) activities to provide knowledge and create understanding of Lesson Study and Open Approach concepts; (2) activities for joint teaching plan development, teaching trials, observing joint teaching, and reflecting at 7 volunteer schools; (3) reflection on joint activities throughout the year; (4) a national classroom opening activity to share results with a broader audience.	July 2023–May 2024 (Year-long collaborative design, including joint planning and reflection activities)
3. Implementing the Plan Through Lesson Study and Open Approach Methods	The implementation followed four steps: (1) planning: teachers collaboratively created detailed lesson plans; (2) teaching: one teacher taught while others observed; (3) observing: observers focused on student engagement and learning; (4) reflecting: teachers discussed the lesson's effectiveness and revised the plan as needed. Re-teaching occurred to refine the approach.	The planned activities were implemented as follows: (1) activities to provide knowledge and understanding of Lesson Study and Open Approach concepts were conducted on 23–24 July 2023; (2) joint teaching design activities took place 7 times online before observing teaching in volunteer schools; (3) Islamic Studies classes were opened in 7 schools on specific dates; (4) summary and reflection on all work results were conducted on 9–10 January 2024; (5) a national Islamic Studies classroom opening activity is scheduled for 5 May 2024.	July 2023–May 2024 (Implementation across multiple schools on specified dates: 24 July, 23 September, 16 November, 23 November, 30 November, 6 December, 14 December 2023; 9–10 January 2024; 5 May 2024)
4. Assessing and Revising the Action Plan	Comprehensive reflection sessions evaluated the Lesson Study process. Teachers discussed strategies, challenges, and improvements. Findings were documented and shared, establishing a feedback loop for ongoing improvements.	The overall reflection highlighted key areas of development among teachers: (1) focus on learners' competence; (2) reduced learning content; (3) connection to real situations; (4) utilizing diverse Islamic principles; (5) enhanced ICT skills; (6) learner-centered focus. The study also proposed five processes for using the Lesson Study model to develop Islamic Studies teachers: (1) creating awareness of the importance of collaboration; (2) designing joint teaching; (3) teaching and observing together; (4) reflecting together; (5) improving the learning plan collaboratively.	January 2024 (Final reflection and assessment of the action plan; proposed model for future use)

4.2. The Outcomes and Effectiveness of Implementing Lesson Study and Open Approach Practices in Islamic Studies Classrooms

Implementing Lesson Study has demonstrated potential in transforming Islamic Studies education, moving the focus from traditional teaching methods to learner-centered approaches that emphasize critical thinking and self-directed learning in the classrooms studied. This shift has brought about several key lessons and changes in teaching practices, as elucidated by the experiences and perspectives of Islamic Studies teachers.

4.2.1. Focus on Learners' Competence

One of the primary outcomes of implementing the Lesson Study and Open Approach is the transformation from knowledge-centric teaching, where teachers primarily deliver content, to an emphasis on developing learners' competencies. Knowledge-centric teaching is a traditional approach in which the teacher is viewed as the primary source of knowledge, with students absorbing information through passive learning. Learner-centered teaching, by contrast, encourages students to become active participants in their learning process, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and self-directed learning.

Participants noted that adopting active learning techniques required teachers to develop new skills, particularly in guiding students to reliable resources and filtering information online. However, some teachers expressed initial discomfort with this transition, as it demanded more time for preparation and a deeper understanding of digital tools and resources. They highlighted the challenge of balancing traditional teaching methods with these new approaches, especially when students struggled to adapt to self-directed learning. This approach has created a more engaging learning environment, as noted by Participant S5T5: "*It is a teaching that increases students' self-learning channels. Children can search for answers to questions or interests, resulting in a more learning atmosphere. From having to find information from thick, boring books, making them sleepy, it has changed from asking teachers in school to having teachers from all over the world, with many books or articles on the internet. These learning processes allow students to develop critical thinking skills, analytical thinking, and finding reasons to support various issues in an interesting way, which is a new role that challenges teachers' potential*". Similarly, Participant S3T25 observed that "*Previously, when organizing Islamic studies learning, the teacher will teach the content according to the book and let the students start practicing. During the period when the students try to practice by themselves, it takes a lot of time to teach them because when we teach the content of the various steps, the students do not really understand. But when we change the teaching method by giving the students the opportunity to study from various video clips and sit and discuss in groups, it turns out that the students understand and practice more easily*".

Moreover, this learner-centered approach has spurred creativity in teaching methods. As described by Participant S8T2, "*Organizing teaching and learning according to this concept allows me to think of various teaching methods that are not boring. I have changed from the original teaching that focuses on lecturing to changing to letting the students bring various ideas and activities by themselves. Sometimes I have the students make Islamic studies infographics and present them in front of the class, which the students do very well. From organizing activities in this manner, the students can practice their skills in using technology in a more useful way*".

4.2.2. Reduced Learning Content

Another significant lesson learned is the benefit of reducing the emphasis on learning content to make room for more student-centered activities. This shift has allowed teachers to focus more on preparing stimulating and contextually relevant materials rather than extensive lesson plans. Teachers observed that reducing the emphasis on extensive lesson planning provided more time to focus on preparing relevant, engaging materials for students. Nonetheless, some teachers felt challenged by this reduction in content, fearing that they might not cover the curriculum comprehensively. There were concerns that simplifying lesson plans could compromise the depth of students' learning, especially for more complex Islamic concepts.

The reduced content has also provided students with more opportunities for self-directed learning and exploration. As Participant S7T25 explained, "*In the past, I taught both mathematics and science, but when there is a science and mathematics subject, in addition to the teacher's workload being reduced, it also reduces the number of class periods for students, giving them more time to play and learn by themselves. Teachers must try to integrate content by using learning resources and media. Sometimes, students are designed to make their own media*". This method has proved effective in maintaining student interest and participation, as illustrated by Participant S4T7: "*Now, the beginning of class often starts with picking up the current situation and having students discuss various issues together. Previously, when teaching, we would teach each topic until it was finished, so when exam time came, we had to rush through the content. Sometimes, we couldn't teach it all. But when the teaching method was changed, everything was able to be taught smoothly and completely according to the indicators of each subject*".

Furthermore, Participant S7T15 highlighted that students retained knowledge better when they actively participated in group processes and self-researched information, compared to the traditional lecture-based approach: "*In the past, I liked teaching by lecturing a lot because I thought that students would gain a lot of knowledge. But when I tried testing through*

an interview about the content of the previous lesson, what did they learn? It turned out that most students could not answer. But when I tried changing the teaching method, emphasizing group processes and having them search for information by themselves and come to discuss in front of the class, it turned out that most students were able to remember the content that they had done in the previous lesson". This finding underscores the value of creating a learning environment where students take an active role in their education, fostering a deeper understanding and long-term retention of knowledge.

4.2.3. Connection to Real Situations

The integration of real-life situations and current events into the curriculum has emerged as another crucial lesson from implementing Lesson Study and open teaching. By using news stories, social media trends, and other current issues as teaching tools, teachers have made learning more relevant and engaging for students. Teachers integrated current events and news stories into lessons to make them more engaging and relatable. However, some participants struggled to find appropriate contemporary examples that aligned with Islamic principles without oversimplifying religious teachings. Additionally, some students showed reluctance to engage with real-world issues, preferring traditional textbook learning, which made it harder for teachers to consistently maintain interest in the material.

This approach has also helped students develop a better understanding of how Islamic principles apply to contemporary issues. Participant S6T2 emphasized the importance of addressing students' behaviors and understanding by discussing popular culture and societal trends, thereby helping students navigate and critically assess their environment: "*Students these days tend to have words, sentences, or popular songs, both good and bad. Students' imitative behavior, especially young children, they do it without even knowing or understanding. As teachers, we must update to keep up with the current trends, we bring up current issues to discuss and ask questions for students to think about, such as meaning, origin, benefits, and disadvantages, in order to create understanding and adjust students' behaviors in the future*". Additionally, Participant S3T26 noted that learning from current situations has enabled students to integrate Islamic teachings into various disciplines more effectively, making the content more applicable and meaningful: "*In the past, Islamic studies teaching was mainly based on books and taught according to the content in the books. Sometimes the content or examples that were picked from the books were so old that students could not apply them. But when we changed the teaching to learning from various current situations, students understood the content and were able to integrate it into various disciplines more*".

Moreover, this method has increased student interest in Islamic Studies. Participant S8T15 observed a noticeable change in student behavior, with students showing more enthusiasm and attentiveness in class when lessons involved current issues and interactive activities: "*Students are more interested in Islamic studies. This can be clearly seen from the original classroom where students would sometimes fall asleep or chat with their friends. Now they want to study Islamic studies more and pay more attention because during class there are fun activities for students to participate in. They can also use their phones to search for various current information to discuss with their friends*". The use of technology and social media as part of the learning process has further engaged students, allowing them to research and discuss contemporary topics with their peers.

4.2.4. Utilizing Diverse Islamic Principles

Teachers have also learned the value of allowing students to explore Islamic principles from various sources. This approach has broadened students' understanding and appreciation of different religious perspectives. Teachers observed that students are increasingly using digital resources to explore diverse Islamic perspectives. Access to a wide range of religious references has broadened students' understanding, allowing them to engage more critically with the material.

Easy access to religious references has empowered students to ask challenging questions and seek deeper understanding, as noted by Participant S6T20: "*Currently, things are happening very quickly, and modern students are brave enough to express themselves and dare to ask questions about challenging issues in society. Fortunately, access to religious references is easy and diverse. Teachers can recommend reliable websites, suggest channels and methods to obtain evidence from the Quran, Hadith, and the views of each madhhab on related issues*". Teachers play a crucial role in guiding students to reliable sources and helping them interpret information accurately. This shift from teacher-led to student-driven exploration has made the learning process more dynamic and engaging, fostering a more profound comprehension of Islamic teachings.

Additionally, Participant S3T22 highlighted that this method has not only made Islamic Studies more interesting but also allowed students to learn from a variety of sources, enhancing their research skills and broadening their knowledge base: "*Previously, we tended to focus on teaching by lecturing. The teacher would prepare the content by himself and let the students only listen and memorize the contents as assigned. However, recently, the teaching method has been changed to let the students search for information by themselves. In the beginning, the teacher would introduce reliable sources of information to the students first. The students were able to search for information from a variety of sources*". By becoming active participants in their learning journey, students are better equipped to understand and apply Islamic principles in their daily lives.

4.2.5. Enhanced ICT Skills

The implementation of Lesson Study and open teaching has also necessitated the development of higher skills in information and communication technology (ICT) among both teachers and students. Teachers have had to upgrade their ICT skills to effectively guide and support students in their use of technology for learning. With the integration of information and communication technology (ICT), teachers have shifted from traditional lectures to more interactive lessons using digital tools. However, many teachers admitted facing difficulties in adapting to new technology. Some lacked the necessary training and support to fully utilize ICT tools, which caused delays in lesson preparation and delivery. The reliance on technology also introduced issues such as technical difficulties in classrooms, which disrupted the flow of teaching and learning.

Self-directed professional development has become essential for teachers to stay updated with the latest technological trends and tools. Participant S6T13 emphasized the importance of continuous learning and skill enhancement through online resources, such as YouTube and Facebook: "*I will study and develop myself in basic technology skills from YouTube and from short clips on Facebook. Simply put, teachers must develop and update their skills all the time because students these days are very fast. Especially the use of social media*". Additionally, Participant S5T21 mentioned the need for collaboration with IT specialists and computer teachers to create a technologically enriched learning environment: "*When using this teaching method that emphasizes the use of technology in teaching and learning, I am the one who is not very good at using various technology tools, so I have to attend some training. Sometimes I have new teachers and teachers who teach computers help me teach, so that I can create an Islamic study class that makes students more interested*".

Students, on the other hand, have benefited from producing their own learning materials, such as infographics and video clips, which has not only enhanced their ICT skills but also made learning more creative and enjoyable. Participant S1T19 described how students have taken on the role of content creators, using social media in constructive ways to share their work and ideas, thereby fostering a more interactive and collaborative classroom culture: "*In the past, I focused on having students learn Islamic studies through various media, but now I have students become producers of various Islamic studies media themselves. Sometimes I have students make Islamic study infographics and have students edit videos through various programs, which the students do very well. As for the work that the students produce,*

the teacher also lets them share it, which is another way for students to use social media in a creative way".

4.2.6. Learner-Centered Focus

Finally, the shift to a learner-centered focus has transformed the role of teachers from being the central figures in the classroom to facilitators and guides. Teachers now emphasize student participation, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. Active learning approaches were seen to enhance student participation, with each student taking on specific roles and responsibilities. However, several teachers noted that not all students adapted well to this learner-centered model. Some students, particularly those used to more structured, lecture-based methods, struggled to manage their own learning effectively. Teachers had to invest extra time in helping these students adjust, which was a significant challenge, particularly in larger classrooms

This approach has also allowed teachers to better understand and address the individual needs and strengths of their students. Informant S8T1 noted that analyzing students individually has enabled teachers to design more effective learning activities and roles, helping students reach their full potential: "*Teaching focuses on the learner. Teachers must analyze students individually, allowing them to see and understand the strengths and points that students should develop. When using this information to design learning activities, assign duties, and create appropriate roles for students, they will work and show their full potential. The informant who used to be quiet and calm is proud of himself. His friends also get to know him better. It creates something new in the classroom atmosphere*". This shift has created a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment, where even previously quiet students feel valued and confident to participate.

By starting lessons with questions and encouraging students to explore and discuss, as highlighted by Informant S1T5, teachers have made learning more interactive and thought-provoking: "*When using this teaching method, I had to change from the traditional teaching method where I was usually the main character in the classroom and let the students listen to what I taught. I changed to letting the students be the main characters instead, while I would just be an observer and support myself. This teaching method makes the classroom more colorful, and the students participate more in organizing the teaching*". This method not only enhances students' understanding of the material but also develops their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, preparing them for future academic and personal challenges.

4.3. Proposed Professional Development Process That Emphasizes Learner-Centered Development

The synthesis of the Islamic Studies teacher development process identified five critical steps: creating awareness of the importance of collaboration, designing joint teaching, teaching and observing together, reflecting together, and improving the learning plan collaboratively. These steps, alongside reflections from Islamic Studies teachers, illuminate the transformative impact of Lesson Study and open teaching methodologies.

4.3.1. Creating Awareness of the Importance of Collaboration

Creating awareness of and understanding the importance of collaboration is foundational for initiating change in teaching practices. This process involves engaging teachers in discussions about the benefits of collaborative teaching and the necessity of modernizing their approaches to align with 21st-century educational standards. It requires a shift in mindset from traditional, isolated teaching methods to more dynamic, cooperative strategies that emphasize student engagement and the use of educational technology.

As highlighted by Informant S7T1, "Islamic studies teachers must change their thinking and understanding first because they still have the same old thinking, sticking to the old teaching style. They must see the importance of new teaching methods, giving importance to the learner's thinking process, and using educational technology in teaching". This reflection underscores the necessity for teachers to shift from traditional pedagogies to innovative, learner-centered approaches that leverage educational technology. Informant

S2T3 added, "If they don't see the importance, it will be difficult to change. How can we make teachers see that teaching that focuses on learners is a method that Islam uses as well? The education system must support and develop teachers to be ready to fully apply the concept of teaching in the 21st century to teaching and learning". This highlights the need for systemic support to foster a culture of modern, student-focused education that aligns with both contemporary and Islamic educational values.

4.3.2. Designing Joint Teaching

The collaborative instructional design process involves teachers working together to plan their teaching strategies. This step emphasizes the importance of cooperative planning sessions where teachers can share ideas, resources, and insights to develop more effective lesson plans. The goal is to create a cohesive and well-rounded educational experience that benefits from the diverse expertise of multiple educators.

Informant S8T11 emphasized the benefits of this approach: "I strongly agree that teachers should come together to plan teaching together. It is definitely better than working alone. Islam also promotes collaboration, and we have seen the perspectives and weaknesses of teaching methods that can be designed and planned together". This collaborative effort allows for diverse perspectives and collective problem-solving, enhancing the quality of teaching. Participant S4T20 also noted, "The design of teaching may not be teachers in the same subject group. Teachers from other subject groups can be invited. Come and share your opinions and exchange ideas about teaching together". This interdisciplinary approach not only enriches the teaching design but also fosters a more holistic educational experience for students.

4.3.3. Teaching and Observing Together

Co-teaching and observation involve teachers partnering to deliver lessons and observe each other's teaching practices. Peer feedback allowed for reflections that led to significant improvements in teaching practices. However, the process of co-teaching and observation was not without its difficulties. Some teachers felt uncomfortable being observed by their peers, especially those with more experience or seniority. This hesitation created a barrier to open and honest reflection in the early stages of implementation, with some teachers feeling judged rather than supported. Overcoming this mindset required considerable effort and trust-building among colleagues.

Participant S8T10 shared, "*Observing the classroom together is very important. We don't often see this culture in Islamic studies groups. Most of them are worried when others come to observe teaching in the classroom. But after we opened our minds and saw its importance, we saw that it was something that helped us teach more and made our teaching better from the reflections of other teachers*". This practice promotes a culture of openness and continuous improvement. Participant S1T2 also reflected on the value of this step: "*This step is very important for Islamic studies teachers. Sometimes we need others to come and share their opinions on our teaching. In a classroom with many students, we cannot observe all the students' behaviors. Having others to help observe allows us to gain points for improving teaching and learning*". The insights gained from peer observations can significantly enhance teaching effectiveness and student engagement.

4.3.4. Reflecting Together

The co-reflection process involves teachers and students analyzing and reflecting on learning outcomes together. This collaborative reflection helps identify successes, challenges, and areas for improvement, fostering a culture of continuous learning and development. It encourages open dialog and mutual support, allowing teachers to refine their practices based on constructive feedback.

Participant S5T5 shared a transformative experience: "*My experience listening to teachers reflect at first made me worried and uncomfortable because I saw many problems in my teaching. After that, I thought back and realized that if no one came to talk to me and advise me like this, I would not have seen my mistakes by myself and they would have been flaws in my teaching forever,*

because I did not solve the problems. Today, I am very proud that my classroom problems have been improved by myself. But there are fellow teachers who help me with advice and look at my problems". This reflection process not only helps teachers recognize and rectify their mistakes but also fosters a supportive community where they can share and receive constructive feedback. Participant S1T24 further emphasized, "*I would like this step to be practiced more often in the classroom. It is like a professional learning community. We feel the sincerity of the reflector. And when we open our minds, we accept what needs to be improved and corrected. And we are happy with our outstandingness that has been reflected as well*". Such reflections are crucial for continuous professional development and creating a positive, collaborative teaching environment.

4.3.5. Improving the Learning Plan Collaboratively

The final step is the iterative process of reviewing and improving the learning plan based on collective experiences and reflections. This involves regular analysis and evaluation of teaching strategies, incorporating feedback from teachers and students to enhance the effectiveness of the learning plan. Continuous improvement ensures that educational practices remain relevant and responsive to student needs.

Participant S1T2 noted, "*This step is another important step. The school should have activities where everyone brings the results of the reflection to improve and develop the learning management plan. It may be a joint learning plan again. So that what we have learned together in the classroom can be extended and developed for better teaching*". The continuous improvement cycle ensures that teaching practices remain relevant and effective, addressing the evolving needs of students. However, this collaborative improvement process posed challenges, particularly when teachers disagreed on the best strategies for student engagement or curriculum adaptation. Some participants felt that the collaborative planning sessions were time-consuming and occasionally unproductive, especially when consensus was hard to reach. In these instances, maintaining focus on the shared goal of student-centered learning became difficult. Participant S8T15 added, "*Teachers' work always needs to be reviewed and improved. We Islamic studies teachers often lack activities to review and develop together from what we have done before. Joint planning again from experience and joint reflection helps develop quality Islamic studies teaching and has a good effect on students in the future*". By incorporating feedback and experiences into the learning plan, teachers can develop more effective and engaging educational experiences for their students.

In conclusion, the implementation of Lesson Study and open teaching in Islamic Studies has led to significant improvements in teaching practices and student learning outcomes. The five critical processes—creating awareness of collaboration, joint instructional design, co-teaching and observation, collective reflection, and iterative improvement of learning plans—highlight the transformative potential of these methodologies. By fostering a culture of collaboration, openness, and continuous improvement, Islamic Studies teachers can significantly enhance their professional development and provide a more engaging and effective learning experience for their students.

5. Discussion

The findings of the participatory action research (PAR) process, as outlined in this study, demonstrate a well-structured and collaborative approach to developing Islamic Studies teachers in Southern Thailand. The emphasis on establishing relationships, designing the research collaboratively, implementing the plan through the Lesson Study and Open Approach, and continually assessing and revising the action plan aligns closely with the core principles of PAR. These principles include collective inquiry, reflection, and action, which are essential for fostering meaningful change in educational settings. The active involvement of teachers in every phase of the research process, from goal-setting to final reflection, highlights the empowering nature of PAR, where participants are co-researchers rather than subjects, thus ensuring that the interventions are contextually relevant and sustainable [65].

In terms of teacher professional development, the study's findings reflect key aspects of effective professional learning communities (PLCs), which emphasize collaboration, continuous reflection, and a focus on student outcomes [66]. The integration of Lesson Study and Open Approach within the PAR framework provided teachers with opportunities to observe, reflect, and improve their teaching practices in real time, which is consistent with the theory of situated learning and professional growth [67]. However, it is important to note that while the reflective nature of these models is praised, the time demands of continuous observation and collaboration were noted as a challenge by some participants. Teachers reported that balancing these activities with their existing workload was sometimes difficult, reflecting a limitation in the broader application of such professional development models.

This iterative process of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting allowed for the development of teaching strategies that were both innovative and grounded in the local educational context, addressing the specific needs of Islamic education. When compared to other recent PAR studies, such as those conducted in multicultural educational settings, the current research demonstrates the adaptability and effectiveness of PAR in diverse contexts. For instance, a study by Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon [56] on PAR in Australian schools similarly highlighted the importance of collaborative reflection and action in teacher development, leading to significant improvements in teaching practices and student engagement. However, the context of Islamic education in Thailand presents unique challenges, particularly in balancing religious content with contemporary teaching methods. This balancing act was a recurring challenge for teachers, as they expressed concern over ensuring the Islamic values were not diluted in the process of integrating modern educational practices.

The implementation of Lesson Study and Open Approach has significantly transformed the teaching of Islamic Studies, promoting a shift from traditional, teacher-centered methods to learner-centered approaches [18,68]. This transformation has emphasized critical thinking, self-directed learning, and the integration of information and communication technology (ICT). However, both internal and external factors have influenced the effectiveness of these changes, and while there are consistencies with previous Japanese lesson studies, the unique context of Islamic Studies offers distinct strengths and challenges.

Internally, the shift from knowledge-centric teaching to a focus on developing learners' competencies has required teachers to develop new skills, particularly in guiding students to reliable sources and filtering information. This has been highlighted in the experiences shared by Islamic Studies teachers. For instance, teachers have noted the need to help students navigate the vast information available online, ensuring they can discern reliable references. This internal factor underscores the necessity for continuous professional development [69].

Externally, the broader educational environment and societal attitudes towards technology and modern teaching methods significantly impact the adoption of these methodologies. Support from the education system and school administration is crucial. As noted by Informant S2T3, the education system must support and develop teachers to fully apply 21st-century teaching concepts. Without systemic support, it can be challenging for teachers to sustain these new practices [70,71]. Additionally, the socio-cultural context of Islamic Studies, which traditionally emphasizes textual learning and memorization, can present external challenges to implementing more dynamic and interactive teaching methods [72,73]. Some teachers expressed concerns that the focus on interactive and learner-centered methods could undermine the depth of religious knowledge transmission, which remains a core goal of Islamic education.

Comparing the findings from Islamic Studies classrooms with Japanese lesson studies reveals both consistencies and differences. Japanese lesson studies emphasize collaborative lesson planning, peer observation, and reflective practice, which are also integral to the professional development of Islamic Studies teachers. The focus on collaborative instructional design, as discussed by Informant S8T11, aligns with the Japanese model where teachers

jointly plan and refine their lessons [20,47]. This approach allows for diverse perspectives and collective problem-solving, enhancing the overall quality of teaching. However, the cultural and religious specificities of Islamic Studies make the application of these models more complex, as teachers must carefully navigate the integration of Islamic principles within a modern pedagogical framework.

However, there are notable differences due to the specific context of Islamic Studies. The integration of real-life situations and current events into the curriculum, as emphasized by Participant S9T10, reflects a unique adaptation to make the content more relevant and engaging for students [74]. This practice is less emphasized in traditional Japanese lesson studies, which often focus on subject-specific pedagogical strategies. The use of current events helps students connect Islamic principles to contemporary issues, fostering a deeper understanding and practical application of their learning [68,75]. Islamic Studies, when taught using Lesson Study and Open Approach, offers several strengths compared to other subjects. One key strength is the holistic integration of ethical and moral education with academic learning. This integration is particularly evident in the learner-centered focus, where teachers emphasize not only cognitive skills but also the development of character and values. This is highlighted by Informant S8T1, who noted the importance of understanding individual student needs and fostering a supportive classroom environment.

Moreover, the emphasis on utilizing diverse Islamic principles allows students to explore a wide range of religious perspectives, enhancing their critical thinking and analytical skills. This approach, as discussed by Participant S6T20, empowers students to ask challenging questions and seek deeper understanding, which is less commonly emphasized in other subjects that may focus more narrowly on specific content areas [72,76]. Additionally, the implementation of ICT skills in Islamic Studies, as noted by Participant S1T19, provides students with valuable digital literacy skills that are essential in the modern world. By producing their own learning materials and engaging with technology, students develop practical skills that enhance their overall educational experience [77,78]. This integration of technology in teaching Islamic Studies not only makes learning more engaging but also prepares students for future academic and professional challenges.

The professional development process emphasizing learner-centered development in Islamic Studies involves creating awareness of the importance of collaboration, designing joint teaching, teaching and observing together, reflecting together, and improving the learning plan collaboratively [79,80]. These steps mirror the principles of professional learning communities (PLCs) and provide a foundation for discussing the success factors of PLCs, cross-cultural factors affecting Islamic Studies teaching, and the consistency with or differences from Japanese lesson studies. Additionally, we will explore the strengths of Islamic Studies professional development compared to other commonly used processes.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have been widely recognized for their effectiveness in fostering collaborative professional development among teachers. The success of PLCs hinges on several factors, including shared values and vision, collective responsibility, and reflective professional inquiry [81,82]. In the context of Islamic Studies, creating awareness of the importance of collaboration is foundational. As Informant S7T1 noted, teachers need to shift from traditional, isolated teaching methods to more dynamic, cooperative strategies. This aligns with the core principles of PLCs, where collaboration and shared goals are essential for success [83]. Moreover, the systemic support highlighted by Informant S2T3 is crucial, as it provides the necessary infrastructure and resources for sustained professional development. Without such support, the collaborative efforts might falter, reflecting the need for a conducive environment that supports PLC activities [84].

Cross-cultural factors significantly influence the teaching of Islamic Studies. The educational philosophies and practices in predominantly Islamic contexts often differ from those in non-Islamic regions, affecting the implementation of collaborative and learner-centered approaches. For instance, the integration of ICT tools, as emphasized by Informant S7T1, may face resistance due to traditional pedagogical norms that prioritize rote learning and memorization [85]. Additionally, the socio-cultural context, which often upholds a

hierarchical teacher–student relationship, may challenge the shift towards more egalitarian and interactive teaching methods. This is where the PLC model can play a transformative role by gradually introducing and normalizing these innovative practices within a supportive community. The success of cross-cultural adaptation relies on the flexibility and responsiveness of the professional development process to local cultural contexts, ensuring that new methodologies are respectful and inclusive of traditional values [86].

Japanese lesson studies share several similarities with the professional development process observed in Islamic Studies, particularly in the emphasis on collaborative planning, peer observation, and reflective practice [51,53]. Both approaches prioritize joint teaching and observing together, as highlighted by Informant S8T10, who noted the importance of opening minds to peer observation. This practice mirrors the Japanese model, where teachers collaboratively plan, observe, and discuss lessons to improve teaching effectiveness [47]. However, a notable difference lies in the contextual adaptation required for Islamic Studies. While Japanese lesson studies are deeply rooted in a specific cultural and educational context, Islamic Studies professional development must navigate a broader range of cultural influences and educational expectations. The integration of real-life situations and current events into the curriculum, as emphasized by Participant S9T10, is an adaptation that reflects the need to make Islamic teachings more relevant and engaging for students in a modern context. This contextual adaptation underscores the importance of flexibility in applying Lesson Study principles across different cultural and educational settings [23].

The professional development process in Islamic Studies, with its emphasis on collaboration and learner-centered approaches, offers several strengths compared to other commonly used processes. One significant strength is the holistic integration of ethical and moral education with academic learning [87]. Islamic Studies inherently combines spiritual, ethical, and intellectual development, providing a comprehensive educational experience. This integration is particularly beneficial in fostering students' moral and ethical reasoning, which is less emphasized in other subjects. The co-reflection process, as described by Participant S5T5, highlights the collaborative and supportive nature of professional development in Islamic Studies. This reflective practice not only helps teachers identify and address their weaknesses but also fosters a sense of community and mutual support, which is a hallmark of effective PLCs [88].

Additionally, the iterative process of improving the learning plan collaboratively ensures that teaching practices remain relevant and responsive to student needs. This continuous improvement cycle, emphasized by Participant S1T2 and S8T15, mirrors the principles of action research and reflective practice, which are central to effective professional development [89]. By incorporating feedback and experiences into the learning plan, teachers can create more engaging and effective educational experiences, which is a strength not always present in other professional development models that may rely more on top-down, prescriptive approaches.

6. Conclusions

The implementation of the Lesson Study and Open Approach in enhancing Islamic Studies teachers in Thailand has proven to be transformative, shifting from traditional teacher-centered methods to learner-centered approaches that foster critical thinking, self-directed learning, and the integration of information and communication technology (ICT). However, this study extends beyond just teaching strategies; it emphasizes the significance of teachers' professional development (TPD) in Islamic education. Professional development models, such as Lesson Study (LS) and professional learning communities (PLCs), have empowered teachers to take ownership of their growth, allowing them to integrate religious and pedagogical knowledge effectively. This shift has led to significant improvements in teaching practices and student learning outcomes. Teachers have developed new skills in guiding students to reliable sources and filtering information, creating more engaging learning environments.

This study also makes a notable contribution by providing a framework for sustainable professional development specifically tailored for Islamic Studies teachers, who often lack access to formal pedagogical training. By engaging in reflective practices through TPD models like PAR (participatory action research) and LS, teachers are better equipped to align Islamic values with modern educational demands. This marks a vital contribution to the body of research on Islamic education, as it directly addresses the gap between religious knowledge and pedagogical expertise in private Islamic schools.

The collaborative nature of these methodologies has also fostered a supportive professional community among teachers, allowing for continuous improvement and innovation in teaching strategies. The focus on learner-centered development has helped students become more active participants in their education, enhancing their critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. The integration of real-life situations and current events into the curriculum has made learning more relevant and engaging for students, helping them connect Islamic principles to contemporary issues. Additionally, the emphasis on utilizing diverse Islamic principles has broadened students' understanding and appreciation of different religious perspectives, further enhancing their analytical skills. The research demonstrates that teacher professional development plays a pivotal role in not only improving instructional techniques but also elevating the quality of Islamic education. This provides schools with a comprehensive model for fostering both religious adherence and academic excellence.

However, despite these positive outcomes, several challenges emerged during the study. One of the key challenges presented by the participants was the initial resistance to the collaborative nature of Lesson Study. Some teachers were uncomfortable with peer observation and found it difficult to openly accept feedback from colleagues. Participants also highlighted the time constraints involved in planning, observing, and reflecting together, as many teachers struggled to balance these activities with their existing teaching workload. Additionally, the socio-cultural context of Islamic Studies, which often prioritizes textual learning and memorization, sometimes conflicted with the dynamic, interactive nature of Lesson Study and Open Approach. Teachers found it challenging to balance the need for students to memorize religious texts with the push for critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

In conclusion, while the application of Lesson Study and Open Approach in Islamic education contexts showed significant promise, it also highlighted the need for ongoing support, training, and adaptation to overcome the challenges presented by traditional pedagogical practices and resource limitations. This study contributes to the field of Islamic education by offering a detailed, learner-centered professional development process that emphasizes reflective teaching and collaborative learning, while also addressing the professional challenges faced by Islamic Studies teachers.

Institutional Review Board Statement: This study has been approved by The Research Ethics Committee for Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education at Prince of Songkla University, Pattani campus, in full compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report. REC Number: psu.pn2-038/65.

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