
Managing change in Islamic schools: A personal reflection from a Madrasah supervisor

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ABSTRACT

As a madrasah supervisor overseeing 30 Islamic schools (MTs and MA), I frequently encounter teachers' resistance to new regulations, curriculum reforms, and professional expectations. To respond to these challenges, I introduced a daily rotating MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran/ Subject Teachers' Working Group) program, enabling each teacher to participate roughly every three months. This article reflects on the implementation of this initiative, examining strategies used to foster teacher engagement, the obstacles faced during the change process, and the insights gained from practice. Drawing on personal experience and relevant literature, the discussion highlights practical implications for effective leadership and change management in Islamic school settings.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of school supervisor roles is to improve the educational quality (Erwiati, 2022). It can be done by conducting teacher professional development, sharing new rule and policy, and supervising teachers' practice in classroom. In my role as a madrasah supervisor, to manage educational change in Islamic schools presents challenges, especially when new curricula, administrative regulations, and professional expectations emerge rapidly. For example, changing perception is rarely embraced easily by teachers. In addition, I found out inconsistency between perception and practice. It is in line with Wahidmurni, Susilawati, & Abidin (2024). They reported that Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teachers exhibit moderate resistance to curriculum changes, particularly in planning, implementing, and assessing new curricula. Similarly, Marlina et al. (2024), reported that although teachers had positive perceptions toward new curricula, their classroom practices did not reflect their perception.

Additionally, teachers in many Islamic schools lack consistent opportunities to engage in structured, collaborative professional development. Furthermore, the teachers argued that they were unfamiliar with new pedagogical demand and rule. A study conducted by Putra, Fauzi, & Rosyadah (2025) revealed that there are some barriers to implement curriculum effectively in Islamic school such as lack of training, insufficient support, and heavy workload. Therefore, I designed and implemented a daily MGMP program, where subject groups rotate so that each teacher attends once every three months. The aim of this program is to sustain professional development consistently despite the large number of teachers involved or under my supervision.

This article reflects on my experience implementing daily MGMP sessions across 34 madrasahs and explores how sustained professional development can help Islamic schools navigate change more effectively.

2. METHOD

This study follows a practitioner reflection approach, focusing on my direct experience as a madrasah supervisor over a one-year period. I conducted Daily MGMP with Rotating Participation due to the number of

teachers I supervise. Thus, a high-frequency meeting model was the only viable way to ensure that each subject teacher could receive guidance. By rotating subject groups, I ensure coverage and continuity. The implementation details are as follows.

- **Daily Sessions:** I lead MGMP almost every day, focusing on different subject-teacher groups each time.
- **Rotation Schedule:** Since the number of teachers is large, each teacher only attends MGMP about once every three months.
- **Focused Topics:** Sessions include collaborative lesson planning, assessment discussions, reflection on teaching challenges, and documentation work.
- **Mentoring Role:** I act as a coach rather than merely a supervisor, offering feedback, encouragement, and follow-up.

Data for reflection were drawn from daily MGMP observations across MTs and MA, teacher reflections and informal discussions during MGMP, review of supervisory reports from each school and personal field notes documenting teacher responses, challenges, and patterns of change. The purpose of this reflective method is not to generalize findings to all Islamic schools, but to provide insight into effective supervisory practices and change management in a large supervision area.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During MGMP and supervisory program, I encountered following challenges and I obtained lessons learned.

Challenges

a. Teacher resistance to change

Teachers' unwillingness to change is one of my primary problems that I encountered. Many teachers are reluctant to change their lesson plans, experiment with different teaching strategies, or become familiar with new rules. While some seem overburdened, others are content with the status quo. This resistance appears consistently across various school contexts, regardless of differences in teacher seniority or subject specialization. The pattern suggests that resistance is not a matter of unwillingness alone but a complex response shaped by personal, institutional, and systemic factors.

A significant portion of this resistance arises from teachers' limited confidence in applying new pedagogical approaches. For teachers who have taught in the same way for many years, shifting to student-centered strategies or integrating new assessments can feel overwhelming. Their apprehension is often intensified by insufficient training opportunities or uneven access to instructional resources. When professional development is sporadic or overly theoretical, teachers are left unsure about how to implement new expectations in their classrooms, leading them to fall back on familiar routines.

Additionally, the school environment plays a crucial role in shaping teachers' openness to change. In many cases, schools offer minimal encouragement or follow-up support after introducing new policies. Without continuous mentorship or a culture that values professional dialogue, teachers perceive change as an additional burden rather than an opportunity for growth. Long-standing habits further reinforce this perspective, making new practices feel disruptive and impractical. As a result, resistance becomes a natural coping mechanism—an attempt to maintain stability in the face of uncertainty.

b. Supervising Many Schools with Large Teacher Populations

Supervising a large number of schools with sizable teacher populations poses a distinct set of issues. In my instance, leading more than 30 madrasahs entails managing a varied range of instructors across several subject areas, each with their unique experiences, requirements, and levels of readiness for change. Implementing uniform strategies and maintaining constant oversight is challenging due to the sheer magnitude of this duty. This leads to a supervisory burden that is both large and extremely complicated, necessitating careful planning and prioritization.

Within these schools, each subject area may comprise dozens of instructors, making it practically impossible to convene all of them at the same time for professional development events. Logistically, coordinated meetings or training sessions must be organized long in advance, however even then, scheduling conflicts and instructional duties limit teachers' availability. Teachers cannot participate

regularly, especially when MGMP sessions are shared across numerous topic groups and held on a rotational basis. This implies that opportunities for group learning and debate are uncommon, and the supervisor must find alternative ways to engage teachers who are unable to come consistently.

Therefore, maintaining consistency in professional development in spite of sporadic attendance and dispersed participation is the primary problem. Without constant interaction, instructors may miss key changes, misunderstand new policies, or fail to adopt tactics effectively in their classrooms. The general advancement of school development initiatives may be hampered by this fragmentation. Therefore, the supervisory function demands creative solutions—such as tailored coaching, follow-up mentoring, and the use of digital platforms—to preserve consistency and continuity across all schools. Sustaining professional learning under these conditions demands tenacity, adaptability, and novel techniques to guarantee that every teacher has the assistance they need.

c. **Weak Professional Learning Culture**

In many schools, a strong culture of professional learning is limited. Hendrickx, et.al., (2025) argue that without community, professional development is difficult to occur. Collaboration between teachers is often minimal and occurs only when there is an administrative need, not as part of a routine effort to improve teaching quality. As a result, opportunities for natural mutual learning are severely limited, even though each teacher has valuable experiences and good practices to share.

Furthermore, professional discussions such as lesson study, peer observation, or joint reflection sessions are not yet common practice. Many teachers focus more on completing daily tasks and administrative burdens than on personal development. The lack of formal structures—such as teacher learning communities—results in inconsistent sharing of innovative teaching practices. This creates a gap between teachers who want to improve and those who are not yet motivated to change.

The absence of a reflective culture also makes the process of change more difficult. When teachers are not accustomed to reassessing their methods, identifying weaknesses, or receiving feedback from colleagues, they are more likely to resist new approaches. As a result, interventions or innovations often fail to develop optimally because they are not supported by a professional environment that encourages continuous learning. To build a strong foundation for change, schools need to strengthen a culture of collective learning that fosters openness, collaboration, and a reflective attitude.

Lessons learned

a. **Consistent support**

The recent massive changes in education policy have forced teachers to adapt. Some teachers find these changes challenging because they are so rapid. Teachers in my area of responsibility stated that they had just learned one regulation and then had to quickly adapt to another. Furthermore, they had just completed training on the new regulations, and when they were about to implement them, another training session on the latest regulations came up. This ultimately led them to believe that even if the regulations changed, their teaching and student-centered approach would remain the same, and they were reluctant to change.

Therefore, the supervisor must provide consistent support dealing with those changes since the teachers rarely transform their practices through policy directives alone. It is in line with a study conducted by Putra, et.al. (2025). They argue that a consistent support is a necessary condition since policy and curriculum changes are often ineffective in schools because teachers receive only sporadic training without follow-up support. Based on my experience, ongoing mentorship and reassurance become essential components of successful change management in schools. Continuous professional development, coaching, and supervisory presence allow teachers to process new expectations at a manageable pace. Through regular dialogue and guided reflection, teachers develop the capacity to integrate new practices rather than merely follow instructions. Supportive leadership—rather than periodic inspection—helps create psychological safety, encourages experimentation, and builds a professional learning culture. In this sense, meaningful and sustained support is not an optional addition to reform efforts; it is a necessary condition for achieving lasting change.

After two year continues professional development was conducted, I found out that teachers became more familiar with new regulations, updated their lesson plans, and engaged more in peer discussion. These

shifts mirror findings from Maulida, Putri, Faozan, & Iskandar (2025) who noted that frequent curriculum changes cause difficulties but also provide opportunities for growth when supported.

b. Building trust

Building trust is more important than enforcing authority. It forms the foundation of any meaningful professional relationship between school leaders and teachers. When teachers feel listened to, valued, and understood, they naturally become more receptive to guidance. Trust reduces defensiveness and creates psychological safety—an essential condition for professional growth. In my supervisory experience, teachers increasingly opened up about their struggles once they felt that my role was not to judge but to support. This relational approach changed the tone of supervision from compliance to collaboration, making development discussions more productive and genuine. Kraft, et. al (2018) report that coaching is effective only when teachers perceive the coach as supportive rather than evaluative.

Enforcing authority alone, on the other hand, often leads teachers to comply superficially without internalizing new practices. When trust is absent, teachers perceive supervision as an evaluative mechanism rather than a learning partnership. This not only limits the adoption of new methods but may also intensify resistance. Therefore, nurturing strong interpersonal connections becomes more important than issuing directives. Trust transforms supervision into a shared journey rather than a top-down mandate, enabling change to occur more naturally and sustainably.

c. Teacher's resistance is not enemy

Teacher resistance should not be interpreted as defiance but as a meaningful indicator of underlying concerns. In many cases, resistance reflects feelings of fear, uncertainty, or a lack of clarity about new expectations. Teachers may worry about failing, losing control of their classrooms, or being judged for not mastering new policies quickly. By approaching resistance with empathy, supervisors can uncover these deeper issues and address them thoughtfully. This shift in perspective turns resistance from an obstacle into an opportunity for deeper dialogue and understanding.

Recognizing resistance as a signal enables supervisors to design more responsive professional development. Instead of pushing teachers to comply, supervisors can focus on clarifying expectations, reducing ambiguity, and providing hands-on demonstrations. When teachers' emotional and cognitive needs are acknowledged, their resistance often diminishes. In my experience, teachers who initially appeared reluctant eventually became more engaged once the underlying causes of their hesitation were addressed. This demonstrates that resistance is not a barrier to progress—it is a message that leadership must interpret and respond to with care.

d. Innovation Requires Structural Support

As highlighted by various global education reforms, innovation cannot thrive solely through individual initiative. Education systems must provide adequate structural support for sustainable change. It is inline with Subasman (2023) who reported that without structural support, innovation is difficult to grow. This includes flexible policies, mentoring mechanisms, access to resources, and sufficient time for teachers to learn and experiment with new approaches. Without this support, teachers will struggle to integrate innovation into their daily practices, as they remain constrained by administrative constraints and heavy workloads.

Furthermore, the success of innovation depends heavily on a school culture that encourages exploration and continuous learning. Ongoing training, professional collaboration, and spaces for sharing good practices are essential pillars in creating an adaptive environment. When teachers feel safe to experiment and believe their experiments are valued, innovation is more likely to emerge and persist. In other words, innovation is not just about new ideas—it's about how schools build ecosystems that support teacher growth and development.

4. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the complex realities of supervising teachers across multiple schools in a context marked by rapid policy changes, uneven professional capacity, and limited structural support. Three major challenges emerged: persistent teacher resistance to change, logistical constraints in supervising large teacher populations, and a weak professional learning culture in many schools. These factors interact to create

an environment in which innovation is difficult to sustain and professional development becomes fragmented. Resistance, in particular, was found to be a multidimensional response shaped by emotional, institutional, and systemic pressures—not merely a matter of unwillingness. From these challenges, several key lessons were identified. First, consistent support is essential for meaningful reform. Second, trust-building is a foundational element of effective supervision. Third, teacher resistance should be reinterpreted as an informative signal that reveals their concerns and needs. Lastly, innovation can only thrive when supported by structural and cultural conditions that encourage exploration, collaboration, and long-term professional growth.

Overall, the findings underscore that teacher development is a relational and systemic process. Sustainable change requires not only competent supervision, but also supportive school structures, consistent guidance, and a learning culture that values reflection, experimentation, and growth. Strengthening these conditions is crucial for improving teaching quality and ensuring that educational reforms translate into meaningful classroom practice.

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