

Towards a Conceptual Framework of Culturally Responsive Leadership, Professional Learning Community on Teacher Competency: An Overview of the Conceptual and Theoretical Literature

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Abstract

This study develops a conceptual framework to identify variables related to the level of culturally responsive leadership among school leaders and the practices of the professional learning community (PLC) towards teacher competency in Malaysia. In addition, this conceptual framework is a guide and direction for conducting research. This conceptual framework will showcase the relationship between the culturally responsive leadership of school leaders, PLC practices, and teacher competency. This conceptual framework employs selected theories that align with the field of study and utilizes these dimensions as research constructs. The Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis culturally responsive leadership theory framework, which consists of four main dimensions, serves as the first used leadership theory or model. Next, Hord's PLC Model, with its five primary dimensions, serves as the second theory or model for PLC practice, while the Malaysian Teacher Standard 2.0, with its four primary domains, guides the assessment of teacher competency among Malaysian teachers. Depending on the scenario, this paper will discuss the theory or model used to guide the study's development.

Keywords: Culturally Responsive Leadership, Professional Learning Community, Teacher Competency.

Introduction

Malaysian society's diversity has had a significant impact on cultural diversity in schools. This requires school leaders to exercise effective leadership to meet the needs of all students from different backgrounds (Khalifa et al., 2016). Therefore, from the school's perspective, the

role of the leader plays a crucial role in determining the school's capacity to prioritize unity and culture in the development of school culture. The role of school leaders includes not only preserving students' culture and society, but also highlighting the variety of learning styles and the subsequent academic success of students in the field of education. Wong and Ng (2021) assert that one of school leaders' responsibilities is to assume the role of a teaching leader. According to Hallinger's (2003) study, a teacher who focuses on student learning requires school leaders to understand the diversity of student ability levels in order to improve student achievement through the teaching process.

Effective leadership is an important factor in addressing the needs of all students, including marginalized, minority, and troubled students. A school is an organization that always strives to meet the needs of all students. Principals and headmaster leadership are important elements in the development and maintenance of school culture for all students (Hollowell, 2019). According to Irina and Karine (2021), the success in the education field of a country can only be measured through the achievements obtained by the educational organization in terms of the leadership of the school organization and the quality possessed by the teachers in the school organization. Bass and Riggio (2008); Burns (1978) concur with this finding, asserting that effective leadership is characterized by a steadfast focus on addressing the needs of all students, without any bias. In this regard, the education sector today, particularly in Malaysia, with its diverse population of races, religions, and nationalities, urgently requires leaders capable of addressing the needs of school staff, particularly students, through culturally responsive leadership practices that strongly emphasize justice and equality in education.

The ability of an educational organisation, such as a school, to improve teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching and learning is a critical factor that affects their level of work competency. According to Mei et al (2022), teachers will show high ability, capability, and commitment to the school organization if given the opportunity to improve their skills through in-school training in line with their needs and professional development. Therefore, school leaders need to plan and provide space and opportunities to further develop teachers' skills, especially those related to their field of work, in order to keep pace with the current needs of teachers and at the same time increase their competencies.

According to Dufour, Eaker (1998); Hord (1997), teachers are human resources who can undergo continuous learning to improve their performance and teaching quality. PLC is the best approach to cultivating the practice of continuous learning, and it makes an impact on the organization. Boyd and Hord (1994); Hord (1997); Hipp and Huffman (2003) assert that a school organization's continuous practice of a learning culture can yield positive outcomes and significantly impact teachers' teaching activities, thereby influencing school management and leadership patterns. The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) has implemented the Continuous Professional Development Plan (CPD) to enhance the professionalism and quality of teachers in Malaysia. This plan is based on thirteen activities that serve as a platform for teacher professional development, including the Professional Learning Community (MOE Release Letter No. 12/2018) (MOE, 2018). Therefore, this study will also examine the extent of PLC implementation in schools, as multiple studies have demonstrated its potential to enhance teacher and school performance.

The government, through the MOE, is making various efforts to produce quality teachers for the national education system. To produce quality teachers in Malaysia, MOE has implemented various initiatives to equip teachers with the best competencies. Shift 4 of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025 discusses the transformation of the teaching

profession into a career of choice. In this shift, MOE intends to make the teaching profession the best profession in the country. Among the initiatives in this shift are the selection of prospective teachers from the best students, curriculum improvement for educational institutions that train prospective teachers, and the ability for teachers to choose career paths based on their level of performance, potential, and interest in areas of education such as leadership pathways, field expertise, and teaching and learning. Promotion, on the other hand, is equivalent regardless of the chosen career path (MOE, 2012).

The Ministry has implemented various initiatives to enhance the quality of teachers by focusing on the competencies they must possess. Through this effort, the MOE has also produced documents that serve as guides in the assessment of teacher competency, such as the Malaysian Teacher Standard (MTS), Malaysian Teacher Standard 2.0 (MTS 2.0), Malaysian Education Quality Standard Wave 2, and Integrated Assessment Education Service Officer. These documents elucidate the competencies teachers must attain, practice, and implement, along with the training that teacher training institutions should provide based on their needs to help them reach the required level of competency (MOE, 2020).

Based on the findings of previous studies, the national education policy, and the diversity environment in Malaysia, the framework of this study was developed to see how culturally responsive leadership practices and teamwork practices through PLC can improve the competence of teachers in Malaysia.

Literature Review

To date, there have been several theories and models of leadership, such as traditional, transactional, transformational, social justice, educational leadership, culturally responsive, and others. All researchers agree that in the organizational context, the individual practice of leading and the desired outcome are to determine the type of leadership practiced (Bass, 1990; Gameda and Lee, 2020; Nahavandi, 2006; Sergiovanni, 2007; Thanh et al., 2022). There are leadership practices that have general characteristics and focus specifically on culture (Ly, 2020).

The changes that take place in the school context necessitate the tendency of leaders such as principals and headmasters to be not only inclusive but responsive to multicultural students' learning and needs (Hollowell, 2019). Only culturally responsive leadership actively addresses issues of inequality, access, diversity, and social justice while advocating for change (Gooden and Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2014; Lopez, 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Madhlangobe and Gordon, 2012; Ryan, 2012). Effective leadership is required to make changes and ensure that all students have access to more engaging, inclusive, relevant, conducive, and quality school experiences and environments.

School leaders should adopt a leadership style that aligns with the school's situation, as they are constantly interacting with individuals who have emotions, such as students, teachers, and staff (Joseph et al., 2020). An appropriate leadership style can influence the behavior and attitude of school members, encouraging them to collaborate for the sake of organizational excellence. Therefore, this study focuses on the relationship between the effectiveness of culturally responsive leadership by school leaders and PLC practices on teacher competency.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

The fourth industrial revolution has demonstrated a variety of leadership practices that principals and headmasters employ to fulfill their roles and responsibilities in schools.

Leadership takes time to create and maintain school culture and improve organizational performance (Jennifer, 2019). Theoharis and Scanlan (2015) say that school leaders who are responsive, inclusive, and socially fair in a diverse school setting can produce excellence for all students. They did this by using case studies to map out the strategies and behaviors of inclusive school leaders.

According to Khalifa (2018), school leaders must play an important role in maintaining cultural responsiveness in schools. In the study he conducted, he also suggested that school leaders must set strategies or guide teachers who are not culturally responsive to accept the best approach to ensuring diversity in schools and culturally responsive teachers (Khalifa, 2018). Culturally responsive leadership in schools requires school leaders to lead by encouraging and asking teachers to engage in critical self-reflection and form a school that involves the participation of all students. School leaders need to demonstrate exemplary attitudes and behaviors to increase confidence that schools are for all students.

In a cultural context, there are many theories about school leaders. Based on various considerations, the Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework was considered the most appropriate for this study. Khalifa et al (2016) also synthesized the literature to identify behaviors found in instructional and transformational leadership. The four main behaviors identified in the framework presented by Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis are: (1) critical self-reflection; (2) forming culturally sensitive teachers; (3) inclusive school environments; and (4) parent and community involvement (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Professional Learning Community Practices in Malaysia

According to Senge (1990), a successful organization is a learning organization, which means an organization that has continuous professional development and cultivates a pattern of learning over time. Peter Senge presented the learning organization theory in his book *The Fifth Discipline*, which explains how the culture of sustainable learning can transform an organization for the better. Senge (1990) developed a PLC model based on this theory to enhance organizational culture, particularly in schools. PLC is the formation of a community that reflects the culture of learning in the organization, where all members learn and become students. In other words, from the perspective of a school organization, each individual within the school community has specific roles and responsibilities to ensure the well-being of all school members (Myers and Simpson, 1998). According to Kamarudin et al. (2019), PLC in schools are principals, school administrators, and teachers. They are considered professional staff who focus on teacher duties and implement continuous learning.

In Malaysia, PLC implementation at the school level began in 2011 and continues today. Therefore, the Ministry of Education (MOE) endeavors to foster PLC practice at the school level through diverse methods, including the creation of the Professional Learning Community Kit in 2019. This kit aims to educate teachers on how to use PLC as a platform for enhancing their professionalism (MOE, 2020). Additionally, the Continuous Professional Development of Education Service Officers MOE (2016) incorporates PLC as a professional development activity for teachers. From 2019 until now, the practice of PLC in schools as a culture has contributed to the development of teacher professionalism (MOE, 2020). The following data in Table 1 demonstrates the MOE's commitment to PLC practice in schools, highlighting the significant improvement in its implementation from 2017 to 2020.

Table 1

Implementation of Professional Learning Communities 2017-2020

STATE	2017	2018	2019	2020
Johor	620	10,969	39,141	30,373
Kedah	127	1,758	8,186	8,276
Kelantan	70	659	14,492	8,929
Malacca	78	985	4,418	3,894
Negeri Sembilan	198	864	8,305	5,860
Pahang	95	542	16,723	16,860
Penang	118	1,255	10,499	6,552
Perak	180	8,584	15,219	14,393
Perlis	48	69	521	565
Selangor	1,698	8,498	42,193	63,058
Terengganu	5	478	12,202	11,765
Sabah	84	1,282	16,061	24,733
Sarawak	354	1,968	14,369	16,012
WP Kuala Lumpur	297	6,632	11,607	12,008
WP Labuan	4	45	576	465
TOTAL	3,985	44,844	215,591	224,917

Source: Teacher Professionalism Division, MOE (2020)

The increase in the implementation of PLC shows the role of all parties, namely school administrators and teachers, as important individuals in the implementation of PLC in schools in Malaysia. According to Kamarudin et al (2019), the implementation of PLC should be able to improve teaching methods and teacher competencies, as well as student achievement through learning activities. Implementing PLC is an approach to producing quality teachers. MOE has aimed to increase the practice of continuous professionalism among teachers to 60% by 2025 (MOE, 2014).

There are several models for PLC practices, including the Senge (1990); DuFour (2004), and Hord (1997) models. However, this study selected the Hord model as its research framework due to its popularity among researchers both domestically and internationally. Among those researchers are (Azura and Mahaliza, 2021; Bolam et al., 2005; Botha, 2012; Dufour and Eaker, 1998; Eaker and Gonzalez, 2006; Kamarudin et. al., 2019; Marzuki, 2013; Nizzuan and Rosnah, 2022; Faiz, 2017; Musimartin, 2014; Norisin et al., 2021; Piret and Eve, 2022; Wilson, 2016; Victor, 2018; Zarizi, 2022). In addition, this model also has a questionnaire instrument called the "School Professional Staffs as Learning Communities Questionnaire" (SPSLCQ) to measure PLC practices. There are five dimensions in this model: (1) leadership partnerships and supportive leadership; (2) sharing vision and mission; and (3) collective learning and application. (4) Private Practice Sharing; (5) Supporting Conditions (Hord, 1997).

Teacher Competency in Malaysia

Various studies conducted in Malaysia demonstrate that the teacher factor influences students' academic achievement and personality formation. According to MOE (2009), producing high-quality teachers requires focusing on several aspects, including the level of knowledge and understanding teachers possess, the importance of teacher professionalism, and their teaching and learning skills. To ensure that teachers can ensure effective student

achievement, the aspects of competency that teachers need to highlight are in line with current educational developments.

MOE is always attentive to teachers' competence. The Malaysian Teacher Standards (MTS), launched in 2009, serve as a guide for teachers in Malaysia to achieve their professional competencies. According to MTS, the three primary domains required by Malaysian teachers are: i) the value of professionalism; ii) knowledge and understanding; and iii) teaching and learning skills. In addition, the Ministry of Education (MOE) produces teacher performance evaluation documents through the Integrated Assessment of Education Service Officers in 2017 and then follows up with teacher quality standard documents such as the Malaysian Education Quality Standard and Malaysian Education Quality Standard Wave 2. However, the current changes in education necessitated adjustments to teacher competencies, prompting the MOE to release the Malaysian Teacher Standards 2.0 (MTS 2.0) framework in 2020. The essence of the framework includes a set of four main domains of competencies: (1) knowledge orientation, (2) instruction, (3) community involvement, and (4) personal quality.

MTS 2.0's development in 2020 is a response to changes in the increasingly challenging educational environment. Teachers must possess competencies that align with the evolving global environment. Therefore, MTS 2.0 is a guide to all the competencies that teachers need to have in order to be quality teachers. The conclusion between changes in the progress of the education system is to provide effective leadership practice and the collaborative practice of school members through the PLC towards increasing the level of teacher competency according to the current educational needs. The findings of previous studies show that leadership, PLC, and teacher competency are the main elements towards school excellence in line with the aspirations of the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) 2013–2025 to improve the quality of the world-class education system and turn Malaysia into a center of excellence in knowledge. As a result, this study will focus on how school leaders and PLC practices improve teacher competency.

Conceptual Framework

The study's conceptual framework encompasses the dimensions of each variable, allowing for a detailed discussion. This study adapts the conceptual framework from previous studies that guided its execution.

There are three parts to this study's conceptual framework. The first part is the culturally responsive leadership of the school leaders, which is an independent variable that will use four dimensions: self-reflection, forming culturally sensitive teachers, inclusive school environments, and parent and community involvement (Khalifa et al., 2016). The second part of PLC practice serves as a mediating variable, utilizing Peter Senge's learning organization theory as the fundamental theory. The Hord model serves as the main model of PLC practice because it is more comprehensive than other models (Deffenbaugh, 2011; Ismail et al., 2021; Turner, 2015; Faiz, 2017; Zarizi, 2022). Furthermore, to strengthen this study, the researcher used five PLC side models (Hord, 1997). This study's third component, teacher competency, serves as the dependent variable. It draws its foundation from the Malaysian Teacher Standard 2.0 model, which serves as a benchmark for teacher competency among Malaysian teachers (MOE, 2020).

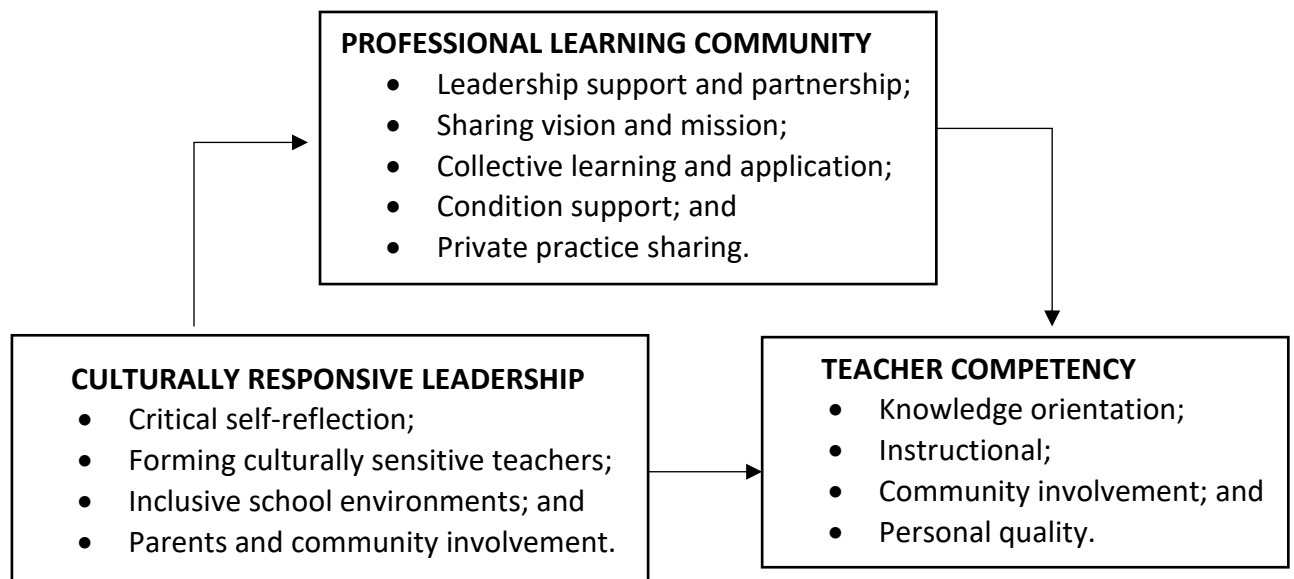


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the study

source: Adaptation of Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework by Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016); Professional Learning Community Model by Hord (1994); and Malaysian Teacher Standard 2.0 by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2020).

Foster (1989) developed culturally responsive leadership by broadening the scope of understanding and transferring the classroom context to the larger school context. According to Victor (2021), culturally responsible leadership in schools involves leadership practices and strategies that develop a school environment that includes students and communities from diverse backgrounds. This leadership style includes caring, relationship building, and culturally responsive nurturing (Davy, 2016; Khalifa et al., 2016). Davy (2016) asserts that school leaders who practice culturally responsive leadership are ready to accept challenges in different communities and strive to set appropriate strategies and methods to create the involvement of all students in the school. In this study, the research aspect is to examine the culturally responsive leadership practices of school leaders. Therefore, the researcher identified the Khalifa et al (2016) culturally responsive leadership framework, which introduces the four dimensions of culturally responsive leadership.

Next, this study employs the Hord (1997) model as its theoretical framework. According to Hord (1997), this model focuses on the school improvement approach and student learning. Senge (1990), an organization with a positive impact on education, forms the foundation of this model. According to Senge, a learning organization within a school can foster a culture of learning and continuously transform its members. Cavanagh (2001) modifies Senge's (1990) learning organization by incorporating the concept of community-based learning, which involves sharing knowledge, expertise, and skills to achieve shared goals. Hord (1997) first introduced this PLC model, identifying five dimensions that each carry the PLC model's main characteristics.

The Ministry of Education introduced the Competency Model Malaysian Teacher Standard 2.0 MOE (2020) as a guide to teacher competency in Malaysia, based on teacher competency theory. There are four main domains in this competency domain: knowledge orientation, instructional, community involvement, and personal quality. These four domains

provide a framework for developing this study on teacher competency variables. Based on Figure 1, the conceptual study refers to the extent to which culturally responsive leadership practices and professional learning communities are impacting teacher competence. This theory and literature serve as a foundation for the implementation of the next study.

Conclusion

Quality education is a necessity for developed countries, including our country, which needs a quality education system to keep pace with globalization. To achieve this desire, school leaders and teachers need to undergo changes according to current needs. This change will only happen on individual initiative. School leaders determine the school's direction, and administrators have to do something to ensure the school's success. When adapting effective leadership practices, however, school leaders must consider the needs of each individual in the school, including teachers, staff, and students. The leadership style used by school leaders determines the success and effectiveness of the organization as a whole. Similarly, teachers must comprehend the diverse educational policies and plans outlined by MEB 2013–2015. All of these recommendations require teachers to continue to prepare through various approaches to ensure teachers are always of high quality. PLC practice serves as a strategy for continuing to improve teaching professionalism, ensuring that teachers remain competitive. School leaders and teachers need to realize that they are the main agents in advancing the country's education towards the best quality education. School leaders and teachers must also work together to make changes in all actions to ensure optimal student achievement. Factors that affect teacher competence include the relationship between leaders and the teacher's work culture. We can improve organizational professionalism by implementing culturally responsive leadership that prioritizes equality, celebrates the diversity of all stakeholders, guides subordinates, and fosters a collaborative work culture within PLC, which in turn enhances teacher competence and ultimately boosts student achievement.

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