The Contribution of Professional Learning Community (PLC) to Teachers' Workplace Learning and Career Development

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify the contribution of Professional Learning Community (PLC) or *Komuniti Pembelajaran Profesional* (KPP) to teachers' workplace learning and career development. Data obtained through questionnaires on 246 teachers were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inference through the SPSS program. The findings revealed that the level of PLC was moderate among the teachers. The results of the study also had shown that there is a moderate and positive correlation between PLC and the two dependant variables, i.e. workplace learning and career development. PLC also had a significant influence on the teachers' workplace learning and career development with a contribution of 40 percent to changes in variance of the two variables. Based on the results, it was concluded from this study that the PLC practice could improve the teachers' way to acquire best teaching and learning practices and enhance their self-professionalism level, which could be useful for their knowledge and professional development.

Keywords: Professional Learning Community, Workplace Learning, Career Development

Introduction

In Malaysia, the national education system has been continuously evolved to cater the needs of the fast-changing world of the 21st century. In the face of such tremendous change, teachers play an important role in school reform and development initiatives to improve the quality of education. They need to enhance their teaching knowledge and skills in response to the challenges of globalization, liberalization, and the rapid development of information and communication technologies. In other words, teachers should embark on a learning revolution in education where they must become 21st century learners themselves before they are able to help students become 21st century learners.

In order to encourage teachers to become professional learners, the concept of Professional Learning Community (PLC) was introduced by previous researchers such as Rosenholtz (1989); Senge (1990); Hord (1997a); DuFour (2016) as a good practice that should be cultivated at school to help teachers to improve their teaching knowledge and consequently improve the quality of teaching and learning process. By working collaboratively and sharing teaching knowledge and experience with other members of the school community, teachers are also able to increase their self-efficacy and promote their professional development (DuFour et al., 2008; Lieberman & Miller, 2011; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Senge, 1990). Previous studies had also provided evidence that the practice of PLC among the school community can enhance students' academic achievement (Bolam et al., 2005; Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008), boost school development (Hofman & Dijkstra, 2010; Schechter, 2008) and cultivate positive and dynamic school culture (DuFour & Fullan, 2013: Mamat et al, 2019).

Although there are numoreous advantages for the members of school community in practicing and sustaining PLC, there are limited literature that explains how such practice can benefit teachers' professional growth, especially in the context of Malaysian schools. Therefore, this study was carried out to further explore the influence of PLC on Malaysian school teachers in order to better understand how it can help them to improve the quality of their workplace learning and be more involved in their professional development activities.

Issues

Hord (1997a) defines PLC as a collaborative initiative taken by school professionals, i.e. school leaders and teachers, to gain new knowledge and share experience in teaching and learning. It is one of the practices implemented by all members of a school community, whether internal or external, to foster collaborative learning among them for the enhancement of students' academic achievement (Hord, 1997a; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Senge et al., 2012).

In Malaysia, the concept of PLC was first introduced by the Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia in the Interim Strategic Planning 2011-2020. In the plan, PLC was specifically stated as one the activities to enhance the quality of teaching, learning and teachers' training. Since then, several State Education Departments have implemented PLC as one of the methods to enhance the education system at school, district, and state level. PLC has also been incorporated as one of the KPI that needed to be achieved by education officers, school leaders and teachers.

However, such initiative has not yet proven to produce significant results in terms of teachers' professional learning and career development. This issue was highlighted by Chong et al. (2016) that there were teachers in Malaysian schools who had demonstrated lack of interest to improve the quality of their teaching and learning practices by collaborating with other educators or participating in learning activities such as conference, short courses, workshops etc. to improve their teaching knowledge.

Abdullah and Ahmad (2009) in their research also revealed that although most Malaysian teachers had high level of PLC practices, the level of their personal practice sharing was fairly low. This is because some of them were not very much open to the idea of sharing of the latest practices of teaching and learning with fellow teachers due to lack of mutual trust among teachers and also lack of support from school leaders. This finding was consistent with DuFour

(2004) who claimed that there were teachers who still prefer to work individually although they acknowledged that working collaboratively was the best practice among teachers.

Some teachers were even not convinced enough that PLC practice would bring positive impacts on their teaching skill and quality (Sims & Penny, 2014). This explains why it is difficult for schools to successfully create an effective PLC and sustain learning culture among teachers for a long period. Other than that, the failure in PLC practice may be contributed by other factors such as time constraint, various work demands, limited resources, lack of effective leadership, no long-term planning and lack of support from school administrations (Bryk et al., 1999; Larrivee, 2000; Voulalas & Sharpe, 2005; Vescio et al., 2008). In short, teachers need to fully understand the concept of PLC and be more supportive in sustaining PLC practice at school in order to improve their teaching knowledge and skills and consequently enhance their professional development.

Although PLC has been numerously debated and discussed among educators and the research community in Western countries (DuFour, 2016), there are limited literature that explores the influence of PLC on teachers in the context of Malaysian schools. Most studies related to PLC by local researchers are more focused on the concept of PLC (Hassan et al., 2018), issues and challenges in implementing PLC (Chong et al., 2016; Abdullah & Ahmad, 2009; Ghani et al., 2014; Ishak et al., 2013) and the role of leadership in PLC implementation (Ghani & Crow, 2013; Mohamad, 2013; Ibrahim & Abdullah, 2012). Hence, there is a need to conduct a research to investigate how PLC practice can be an effective platform to nourish teachers' professional development, particularly in the aspect of their workplace learning and career growth.

In line with this, the study was carried out to determine the contribution of PLC to teachers' workplace learning and career development. Specifically, this study aimed:

i. to identify the level of PLC among the teachers
ii. to investigate the relationships between PLC, workplace learning and career development
iii. to analyze the influence of PLC on workplace learning
iv. to analyze the influence of PLC on career development

The outcome of this study is expected to help teachers to better understand the concept of PLC and its importance on their professional learning and career development thus motivate them to be more involved and supportive in sustaining the practice at school. This study can also be a useful reference for school leaders or school administrators to understand the importance of having efficient and innovative management system for effective implementation of PLC practice and to ensure the continuity of PLC among the school community members. Consequently, this will enhance the quality of education system at school, district and state level.

Methodology
Operational Definitions
PLC is defined as a continuous process where school leaders and teachers collaboratively share their best practices in teaching and learning to enhance teachers' teaching quality with the goal of improving students' academic achievement (Hord, 1997). Therefore, the level of PLC in this study refers to the teachers' perception of the extent to which PLC had been implemented in their school. It is measured by averaging all scores for the 20-items adopted from the PLC evaluation scale developed by Yasim (2014).

Workplace learning in this study refers to the teachers' perception of the way in which their teaching skills were upgraded and their knowledge was acquired at the workplace. It is measured by averaging all scores for the 13-items adopted from the Job Performance of Teachers scale developed by Arifin (2010).

Meanwhile, career development in this study refers to the extent to which the teachers perceived their teaching careers had developed and evolved. It is measured by averaging all scores for the 8-items adopted from the Self–perceived Employability scale developed by Rothwell and Arnold (2007).

Research Design

This study was conducted by using quantitative approach through survey method to gather the teachers' perception of the level of PLC implementation at their school, the way their learning was acquired at the workplace and the extent to which their career had developed. A total of 246 teachers from 29 primary schools in the Kuala Nerus district of Terengganu were randomly selected to participate as survey respondents. Table 1 illustrates the demographic profile of the respondents based on gender, age, academic qualification, teaching experience and option of teaching subjects.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Attribute		Frequency (n)	Percentage
Gender	Male	84	34%
	Female	162	66%
Age	<30	4	2%
	30-35	40	16%
	36-40	57	23%
	41-45	62	25%
	46-50	46	19%
	51<	37	16%
Academic	Master/PHD	9	4%
Qualification	Degree	189	77%
	Diploma	41	17%
	Others	7	3%
Teaching	1-10 years	63	26%
Experience	11-20 years	96	39%
	21-30 years	80	32%
	31 years and above	7	3%
Option	Malay Language	66	27%
Subjects	English Language	25	10%
	Science	24	10%
	Maths	42	17%
	Islamic Education	43	18%
	Art	6	2%
	Pre-school	7	3%
	Physical Education	3	1%
	Living Skills	12	5%
	Special Education	6	2%
	Music	6	2%

The survey instrument was divided into four main sections which are Section A: Demographic Profile, Section B: The Level of PLC, Section C: Workplace Learning and Section D: Career Development. Likert scale was used to measure the responses for all items in Section B-D from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The data collected from the survey were then analysed using SPSS version 25.0 software utilizing descriptive, correlation and regression analysis.

Findings
Level of PLC
The first objective was to identify the level of PLC among the teachers. Descriptive analysis was carried out to evaluate the respondents' perception of the PLC practice at their school. The results of the mean value were interpreted based on three levels which are: high (mean values between 5.0 and 7.0), moderate (mean values between 3.0 and 4.9) and low (mean values between 1.0 and 2.9).
The results indicate that the level of PLC was moderate among the respondents (mean = 4.34, SD = 0.7247). This means that more efforts should be made by the school leaders to encourage teachers to learn collectively through meetings, discussions, and sharing of ideas, knowledge and

experience. As recommended by Andrews and Lewis (2002), this practice can build better knowledge development among them as compared to when they are learning in *silo*.

Relationship between PLC and Workplace Learning

Correlation analysis was carried out to investigate the relationship between PLC and workplace learning. Hair et al.'s (2007) interpretation was used to evaluate the strength of the relationship between the two variables.

The results revealed that there is a moderate positive correlation between the variables. Table 2 illustrates the findings of the correlation analysis.

Table 2. Results of Correlation Analysis between PLC and Workplace Learning

Variable		Workplace Learning
PLC	Pearson Correlation	.58**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	246

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Relationship between PLC and Career Development

Correlation analysis was also carried out to investigate the relationship between PLC and career development. Based on Hair et al.'s (2007) interpretation, it was found that the relationship between the two variables was also moderate and positive. Table 3 illustrates the findings of the analysis.

Table 3. Results of Correlation Analysis between PLC and Career Development

Variable		Career Development
PLC	Pearson Correlation	.50**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	246

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The Influence of PLC on Workplace Learning

Regression analysis was carried out to analyze whether PLC had a significant influence on workplace learning. The results of the analysis are shown in the Table 4 below.

Table 4. Summary of Regression Analysis between PLC and Workplace Learning

Variable	R	R^2	Coefficient		t	Sig
			B	Std. Error		
PLC	.63	.40	.45	.63	21.30	.000

Dependent Variable: Workplace Learning

The R square value shows that 'PLC' explains 40% of the variances in 'workplace learning' scores which indicates a moderate level of influence. It can also be seen from the table that the B Coefficient of 'PLC' towards 'workplace learning' is .45 at $p<0.05$ which indicates a significant and moderately positive influence of PLC on workplace learning. In other words, there is sufficient

evidence to conclude that the implementation of PLC among the teachers had a significantly and moderately positive influence on the way their learning was acquired at the workplace.

The results are consistent with previous research on the influence of PLC on workplace learning. As highlighted by Collinson and Cook (2003) and Mawhinney (2010), the knowledge-sharing processes through PLC could be a useful source of learning for teachers. In addition, Andrews and Lewis (2002) and Høyrup (2010) also claimed that the implementation of PLC enables teachers to build better knowledge development by observing other teachers, learning collaboratively through the sharing of experience and knowledge, learning through mentoring situations, learning from mistakes, and learning through individual or collective reflection.

The Influence of PLC on Career Development
Regression analysis was also carried out to analyze whether PLC had a significant influence on career development. The results of the analysis are shown in the Table 5 below.

Table 5. Summary of Regression Analysis between PLC and Career Development

Variable	R	R^2	Coefficient		t	Sig
			B	Std. Error		
PLC	.63	.41	.45	.64	21.40	.000

Dependent Variable: Career Development

The R square value shows that 'PLC' explains 41% of the variances in 'career development' scores which indicates a moderate level of influence. It can also be seen from the table that the B Coefficient of 'PLC' towards 'career development' is .45 at p<0.05 which indicates a significant and moderately positive influence of PLC on career development. In other words, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the implementation of PLC among the teachers had a significantly and moderately positive influence on the extent to which their career had developed.

The findings are also in line with previous research on the influence of PLC on career development. According to Bonces (2014), PLC is thought of as a better option to provide professional development for teachers. It offers a platform for teachers to enrich and improve their teaching practices, thus provides them with more power in shaping their own career development as compared to traditional professional development programs (Stanley, 2011). Similarly, there are other literature reviews which also supported the idea that PLC can promote professional development among teachers (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Lieberman & Miller, 2011; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Senge, 1990).

Conclusion
It can be concluded from this study that the PLC practice provides numerous advantages for teachers, especially with regards to their workplace learning and career development. Teachers who are actively involved in PLC are more likely to improve the quality of their teaching practice and enhance their professional knowledge, which can lead to enhancing students' learning quality. They are also more likely to enhance their self-efficacy and self-professionalism level, which can be useful for them in their professional development.

In short, it is important for teachers to be more involved in sustaining the PLC practice at school. It is also important for school leaders to give their full support to this practice and put more efforts in encouraging teachers to share their ideas, knowledge, skills and experiences especially with respect to the quality of teaching and learning practices.

This study was only limited to investigate the influence of PLC on teachers' workplace learning and career development. In other words, it did not consider other outcomes of PLC such as its influence on teachers' motivation, job satisfaction, commitment, leadership skills, innovative behaviors etc. Since not many PLC studies considered examining these outcomes, future research should be undertaken to broaden our understanding of the advantages of PLC for teachers in the context of Malaysian schools.

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