



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

JULY 2023, VOLUME 11, ISSUE 3, 48 - 62
E-ISSN NO: 2289 – 4489

IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES ON TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN OMAN

Hamed Al-Yahmadi^{1*}

[1]
Arab Open University,
Oman

Corresponding Author:
Arab Open University,
Oman

E-mail:
hamed.y@aou.edu.om

ABSTRACT

Teaching is a complicated profession that involves constant fulfilment of several traits and qualifications for the entire length of the teacher's career. Ideally, professional learning communities (henceforth PLC) have the potential to boost teacher professional development (henceforth TPD). Nevertheless, the execution of the PLC is not always implemented as planned. This research aims to explore the situation of PLC and the impact of these communities on teacher professional development in some schools in Oman. Qualitative research design using the explanatory approach was employed. Data from interviews, observation and document analysis were triangulated to probe the impact of PLC on teacher professional development. A purposeful sample of 13 participants took part in the study. These include teachers, principals, supervisors, and policy makers selected from six primary schools in the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman. The study revealed that there were insufficient training programs for teachers, principals, and supervisors on how to run these communities. Moreover, principals and teachers are all heavily burdened with administrative duties that impede them from focusing on the developmental implications of PLC. Furthermore, the lack of opportunity for teacher input in the entire teaching-learning process is a stumbling block to the recognition of the impact of PLC on teacher growth. Despite that, PLC offers a great opportunity for teacher growth if implemented in the right way.

Keywords: Oman, School Education, Professional Learning Communities, Teacher Professional Development



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

INTRODUCTION

We live in an era that highly values excellence in teaching-learning processes and promotes performance-based education quality. The need for remarkable professional development has emerged as an important field of investigation in educational reform. Professional learning communities play a major role in this regard.

The current standpoint regarding professional learning communities suggests a swing in the main objective from only focusing on teacher knowledge and skills to including more cooperative practices with a special focus on teacher professional development (TPD). Therefore, professional learning communities have two key purposes: improving teaching-learning processes and promoting teacher professional development (Razi & Kargar, 2014, Talbert, 2010; and Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

From these points we need to investigate the teachers' perceptions of the impact of professional learning communities on TPD in Oman. Moreover, we need to pursue the schools' facilities provided for the execution of PLC to enlarge their impact on TPD. These two purposes of professional learning communities are logically linked, bearing in mind that excellence cannot be merely associated with the original purposes of the procedure but may be caused by the implementation of the professional learning communities as well. This impact may manifest itself at the administrative level, at the society level, and at the personal level (Alyahmadi & Al-kiyumi, 2014). The individual level, where teachers themselves get involved in professional learning communities, is the focus of the current study.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

Professional learning communities, if implemented properly, have several positive impacts on teacher professional development. Caine and Caine (2010) emphasize that the impact of professional learning communities can manifest itself in several ways in teacher professionalism. They explain that those communities might influence teacher enthusiasm, skills, contentment, collaboration, harmony, degree of confidence, and societal support. Moreover, professional learning communities influence decisions taken by both the organization and the teacher regarding the state of teaching-learning processes.

For this purpose, this qualitative study tries to track the real impact of professional learning communities on TPD in Oman. Specifically, it pursues responding to these two questions:

- 1) What are the teachers' perceptions of the impact of professional learning communities on TPD in Oman?
- 2) How could schools facilitate the execution of PLC to maximize their positive impact on TPD?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study relies on a theoretical framework that is comprised of two parts: the execution of PLC and TPD.

The Execution of PLCs

PLCs are generally considered a critical component in enhancing teacher performance. If implemented well, PLC can support the teacher's development and provide him/her with needed confidence in the teaching/learning processes. PLCs "are a process in which teachers work" together in collaborative way via "collective inquiry and action research to improve student success" (Alyahmadi & Al-Sammakhi, 2021, P. 83). In this context (PLCs), can be a good way to educational reform. The implication of teacher cooperation has also been stressed to be substantial in evolving educational systems.

To sum up, professional learning communities are deemed by most educators to be an essential element of the teacher professional development process, even though some take the opposite view, especially in relation to



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

career accountability. To guarantee accountability, a helpful, mutually respectful, and reflective method of cooperation is required.

Teacher Professional Development

Educational organizations exert great effort on teacher professional development to provide teachers with what is needed to perform well in their schools. Nevertheless, the methods used “have little actual effect on classroom teaching as not much change happens, and if it does, it does not last long” (Farrell, 2015, p. 7).

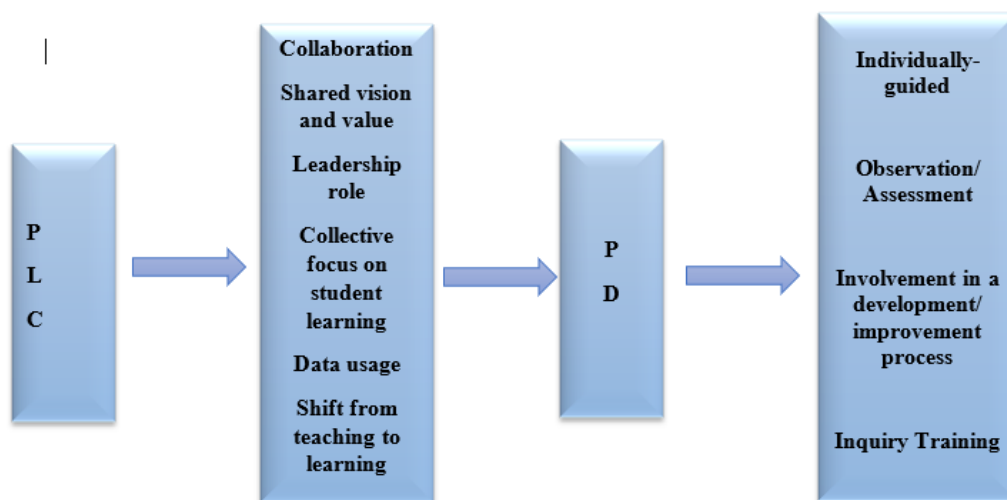
Teacher professional development is considered the scaffolding for enhancement of teacher work. Glatthorn (1995, as cited in Alyahmadi & Al-kiyumi, 2014), define that teacher professional development as “the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically” (p. 41). Teacher professional development is a continuous process comprising of activities like training workshops, seminars, and reading books. This approach compels teacher improvement and, accordingly, pupil achievement.

This perspective in Oman on professional development as on-the-job training consisting of seminars or lectures has only recently started to change. Professional development is now considered a constant procedure that includes organized knowledge which promotes teachers’ aptitude to be professional in their work. It aims to develop and then support an environment that makes the profession a delight and to provide continually new understandings that make it possible for people to grapple with obstacles collectively (Caine & Nummela, 2010).

Consequently, for the teachers in the school to benefit from the compensations of PLCs, it is vital to them to distinguish what foundations that influence the PLCs’ processes and what are the insights of the teachers towards these foundations. It is noticeable that teachers can improve their teaching through PLCs if it is taken seriously, supervised by proficient administrators, and supported by collective focus on student advancement.

For the aim of the current investigation, the researcher used the Alyahmadi and Al-Shammakhi (2021) framework on professional learning communities and developed a model on teacher professional development (Figure 1). The researcher adopts this model because it is parallel to the new trends of the Ministry of education in the Sultanate of Oman in involving teacher effectively in the school activities. This framework illustrates the impact of PLC on TPD.

Figure 1: *The Impact of PLC on TPD*



Note: Adapted from Alyahmadi & Al-Shammakhi (2021) and Alyahmadi (2012).



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

The elements in Figure 1 are described as follows:

Collaboration: Collegiality and collaboration are very important and have a tangible impact on teachers in modern schools. Alyahmadi (2012) suggests that teachers with collaborative behaviors have high self-esteem and are committed to improving their performance. PLC ought to create an excellent relationship among teachers. The relationship supports teachers to be involved collaboratively in professional activities inside and outside the classroom.

Shared Vision and Values: In addition to collaboration between the teachers and the administration, teachers also must share their ideas and learning among themselves at school. A teacher can trust his or her colleague if he feels that the friend is willing to share his or her experience, in which case a colleague can provide the needed feedback to the teacher.

Leadership Role: PLC is a type of instructional leadership which eventually aims to advance the instructional practice of teachers. Senior teachers who are supposed to carry out the task of organizing PLC ought to be highly qualified, as well as possessing comprehensive knowledge of the relevant curriculum, content, and instructions and being able to provide applicable steps for advancement and professional development.

Collective Focus on Student Learning: In Oman – where this study is conducted – the recent efforts to reform education emphasize the outcome of student learning (Alyahmadi, 2012). PLC in the Sultanate ought to consider this important component in promoting teacher professional development.

Data Usage: Gathering, analyzing, and justifying data is very important in PLC (Alyahmadi & Al-Shammakhi, 2021). For sure, such a process provides teachers with a clear view of what is going on in their school, hence enabling right decisions regarding the teaching-learning process.

Shift from Teaching to Learning: Teachers need learning opportunities as a part of their regular work. Acquiring learning needs time and effort in school. Schools' ought to provide a variety of resources via job-embedded learning strategies such as training, peer assistance, and action research. By doing so, the school establishes the teacher as the "active person" in their own learning.

Alyahmadi (2012) describes five models of TPD that are clear and useful in evaluating teacher improvement:

(a) Individually guided teacher improvement: by which teachers read professional publications (books, journals, magazines...), chatting with other professionals about educational issues relating to practices in classroom, and implementing new pedagogical strategy.

(b) Observation/assessment: by which an individual teacher can guild colleagues via observing his/her work and assessing performance. This strategy provides a mutually respectful relationship among teachers inside and outside the school. Trustfulness eases the way to supply recommendations to promote teaching/ learning processes.

(c) Involvement in a development/improvement process: by actively participating in developing curriculum or adjusting it to the local context, providing attractive activities, and "being involved in systematic upgrading processes" (p. 53).

(d) Inquiry: The base of this model is the belief in the capability of teachers in developing profound questions about their own work and consequently practicing the real answers.

(e) Training: Training models include examination of Knowledge, demonstration of skills in different circumstances, receipt of work feedback, and classroom coaching.



METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current investigation was conducted through a qualitative approach, and specifically a narrative approach. It has been acknowledged that utilizing the qualitative information gathered via interviewing the decision makers face-to-face, observing their work systematically, and analyzing related document can help researchers to the heart of the phenomena under investigation (Punch, 2013). Moreover, qualitative research describes phenomena based on the point of view of the participants, discovers multiple realities and develops holistic understanding of the phenomena within a particular context (Yin, 2014). The credibility of qualitative research is, to a large extent, dependent upon the capabilities and efforts of the researcher (Saunders et al., 2018).

Sample and Data Collection

For the purpose of this investigation, six primary schools in Muscat Governorate were selected via a purposeful sample strategy. In qualitative approach the small size of sample paved the way Infront the researcher for more in-depth investigations. The researcher chose schools led by principals who have completed training courses in Specialist Center for Professional Training of Teachers, since they have acquired theoretical and practical skills of applying PLC.

This research strategy required the adoption of several research methods including:

- 1) Reviewing and analysing the related documents that illustrate the main purposes, the clear standards, the precise indicators, and the thorough strategies of PLC within the teaching and learning arena. in the Sultanate of Oman.
- 2) Conducting semi-structured interviews with some key participants in the Ministry of Education. The key informants consist of decision makers, educational supervisors, school principals, senior teachers, and novice teachers.

It is worth mentioning that all interviews were conducted individually to obtain profound data. Moreover, Arabic language is utilized, since it is easy to communicate with the participant and understand utilized terms, proverbs, and idioms. Table (1) illustrates the distribution of informants participating in the study.

Table 1. *The Distribution of Informants Participating in the Study*

Position	Decision maker	Educational Supervisors	School principals	Senior Teachers	Teachers	Total
No. of Informants	1	2	3	3	4	13
Dubbed	DM	S	SP	ST	T	
	DM	S1, S2, S3	SP1, SP2, SP3	ST1, ST2, ST3	T1, T2, T3, T4	

- 3) Conducting accurate observations of the PLC techniques to gain a thorough understanding of the execution of PLC and the school atmosphere in which this execution takes place.
- 4) Presenting in-depth discussion of and conclusions about the prime themes of the study and related issues.



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

The combination of document analysis, interviews and observation paved the way to study this phenomenon from different perspectives and allowed the researcher to use a variety of lenses to obtain an inclusive understanding of the reality of the implementation process (Hunter & Brewer, 2015). Moreover, by means of these resources, the study describes the day-to-day practices, decision making activities and official strategy changes regarding the PLC process.

Analysis of Data

Data analysis was performed shortly after each transcript was prepared and after translating the Arabic version to English. In this study the researcher employed thematic analysis to conduct the analyzes of the massive qualitative data as illustrated by Braun & Clarke (2012). This technique involves reading through a set of data seeking a pattern in the comprehensive intending of the data to discover themes. The first step of analysis is the coding process, which entails engaging in related words or phrases stated by the informants or mentioned in the documents being analysis. These words or phrases are then combined in order to realize the connection between them. The researcher used NVivo9, a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) computer software package produced by QSR International, for this purpose.

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher utilized the method of triangulation (Carter et al., 2014). The interview data gathered from multiple interviewees, the documents collected in this field, and the observations conducted were triangulated with each other to highlight varied insights and individual subjectivities regarding the PLC process.

Regarding ethical issues, there was no recognized jeopardy and/or hardship pertaining to the study. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher used an interview permeation form in order to inform participants about the purpose and procedures of the interviews.

Finally, the small sample of participants taking place in this study allowed the researcher to understand the specific details that impact the application of the PLC in the Omani schools and its impact on teacher professional development. That is because samples in qualitative research are relatively small for supporting the depth of analyzing case by case that is vital to this type of investigation.

FINDINGS

The current study obtained some significant findings which is worth the time and effort exerted in collecting the data pertaining to the execution of PLC and its impact on TPD in Oman. The finding here will be presented according to the research questions. The initial stage of the data collection revealed that teachers and administrators are participating actively in the PLC. They feel that they are implementing Collaboration, Shared Vision and Values, Leadership Roles, Collective Focus on Student Learning, Data Usage, and Shift from Teaching to Learning.

However, from the subsequent phase of data collection, use of intra-case analysis for distillation of the raw material gathered from the first phase interviews and cross-case analysis to seek generalization – as mentioned by Punch (2013) – it appears that the teachers and administrators are exerting considerable effort but not to the extent that is likely to affect the quality of TPD in their schools.

The First Question: Teacher Perceptions of PLC

The first question in this study states: What are the teacher perceptions of the impact of the execution of professional learning communities on teacher professional development in Oman? In attempting to respond to this question, the following paragraphs are devoted to analyzing the documents, interviews and observations pertaining to PLC in the Sultanate of Oman. The analysis process is based on the six basic themes considered to be the main factors that affect the implementation process, as shown in the conceptual framework below. It is also based on



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

the five main variables of the teacher evaluation system mentioned in the conceptual framework: Individually guided, observation/assessment, involvement in a development/improvement process, inquiry, and training. These are explained in Table 2.

Table 2: *Teacher Perception of the Various Aspects of PLC*

Theme	Interviewees' Reactions
Collaboration	Regarding collaboration between the teachers in schools, the interviewees mentioned that it is sufficient and productive in this aspect. However, the interviewees mentioned a shortage of collaboration among the top and the bottom of the Ministry structure. A similar observation was made by the implementers.
Shared Vision and Values	All interviewees asserted that the school provides a fair opportunity to share their vision and value. However, they raise the issue of lack of involvement in the entire teaching-learning system.
Collective Focus on Student Learning	Many teachers and evaluators denied that the school focuses completely on student learning. However, some teachers recognized some positive attitude toward this issue.
Shift from Teaching to Learning	Most of the teachers asserted that the PLC system has two prominent weaknesses: lack of in-service training, and lack of competence on the part of the supervisors. Most teachers complain that the time allocated to conduct the PLC is not adequate to improve teacher professional development.
Leadership Role	Many interviewees raised the issue of the leaders' effectiveness in managing the PLC implementation. Most of the interviewees have negative attitudes concerning the process of conducting the PLC and the value of its impact on their career life.
Data Usage	Many of the interviewees acknowledge PLC has an impact on their individual pursuit of improvement in their teaching. Though, most of them disagree with the direct influence of PLC in their work improvement. Furthermore, most of them criticize the role of PLC in teacher career advancement such as salary increase or position advancement.

Collaboration

The environment in which the teacher works influences the performance expected; thus, it must be fully considered in the PLC process. During the conduct of the study the researcher tried to investigate if there is room for collaboration in schools such that the PLC will be efficiently conducted.

Most of the interviewees are satisfied with the collaboration between teachers, and between teachers and the administrative staff, in schools for the purpose of TPD as well as for the intention of assisting and supervising teachers' performance. SP2, a second cycle school principal, expressed her satisfaction regarding the collaboration in her school. She said: "Al-hamdu-lillah [thanks to God]; all of our work is done collaboratively, and we are proud of that." All school principals had similar responses.

The analysis further revealed that many interviewees agree that the schools have built a collaboration bridge between teachers and administrators, and that is a good trait affecting the success of the implementation of PLC.



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

Some of the channels they mention are regular meetings with the principal, the regular meeting with the Head of the Directorate, and the Ministry's online portal by which they can connect and cooperate with the high level.

Moreover, interviewees feel that society should be consulted and urging to play a vital role in school affairs in general and in the quality of education. The researcher perceived this approach being taken by (SP1), a second cycle school principal. He invites parents to school to join in and support the educational activities that the school is undertaking. This is, indeed, a powerful idea and unique perspective. The school principal said in responding to the researcher's question regarding the purpose of this behavior: "The public is our backbone; without their support we cannot reach our professional goals." He considers collaboration between all teachers to be a vital component of the teaching-learning process, in general, and in activating the role of PLC, in particular.

As for the micro-level collaboration, most of the interviewees expressed happiness about the teamwork between teachers themselves and between teachers and the administrators. The interviewees believe that interaction among teachers is a crucial element of success in the school. They consider collaboration, coaching and mutual supervision to be inspiring means for the goal of advancing classroom practice and, thus, promoting students' achievement.

In her explanation of the effect of the professional dialogue, an English teacher asserted that she and her colleagues have a regular meeting every week. In these sessions they discuss many issues related to their subject. She said: "Every week we - as English teachers - have a period allocated specifically to debate concerning several professional issues. Sometimes, the supervisor attends our session and the principal as well. It is a very helpful time. We benefit a lot" (T1). Similarly, another teacher has nearly the same feeling. She said:

Actually, we take benefit from the mutual dialogue with our school mates more than from any other measure. Considering that some of our colleagues have had very long experience, we value what we can gain from them, and we try to acquire their feedback when they visit us in the classroom (T4).

On one occasion, the researcher found a good opportunity to attend one of these sessions with math teachers in a large school in the region. Five math teachers attended that meeting. The session was introduced by the senior teacher, who demonstrated to his colleagues an instructional tool that had been invented by a math teacher to illustrate a geometry lesson for students in the ninth grade. He requested their feedback regarding the suitability of this tool for the ninth-grade level. Also, he asked them if it could achieve the goal that the teacher desired his students to attain.

Shared Vision and Values

One of the key tenets of PLC is that it is based on teachers working in a collaborative manner seeking mutual benefits individually and organizationally. The school should learn from this mosaic of opinion and experiences. Schools must solicit participation from all teachers to develop the policy and monitor its implementation.

To explore this issue, the researcher posed the following question to all teachers he interviewed: As a teacher, do you participate in any way in formulating, reviewing, or evaluating any part of school policy including PLC? Almost most of the teachers interviewed denied being involved one way or another in policy formulation or any related procedures such as goal setting, standards review and suggesting procedures and methods. The remaining teachers have opportunities to be involved, but they described these opportunities as being limited, trivial and having no impact on the school policy.

Teachers express that "teachers are pursuing the upper authority to accept their experiences regarding teaching, supervision or evaluation" (T1). But the reality is that: "Nobody listens to our suggestions or recommendations" (T4). (T4) is a teacher with nineteen years of experience. His statement indicates the deep gap between the teachers and the policy makers in the Ministry of Education. It is well-known that if PLC is to produce teacher professional growth,



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

teachers must be involved dynamically in the entire teaching-learning system. Teachers believe that they “must participate actively in formulating standards, setting procedures and analyzing collected data” (S3). That is, according to this supervisor, because:

Teacher involvement, without doubt, implants in teachers a sense of collaboration and orients them to be more active in dealing with several sorts of instructional programs. In fact, teachers have no voice in most of the critical decisions related to their career life such as professional development (S3).

Actually, teacher involvement enhances the quality of teaching, value of supervision, and the worth of PLC implementation. Supervisors, school principals and senior teachers should strongly encourage involving teachers effectively in numerous ways relating to the teaching-learning process. Schools should also offer an opportunity for teachers to express their educational views and schemes and to verbalize how they are reflected in the educational input, process, and output. That is what a supervisor of biology, like others, thinks. He says, “Although, I have long experience of more than 17 years as a teacher, I wasn’t summoned for such involvement, and my colleagues weren’t either” (S1).

It is unquestionable that in any work setting the appreciation of a person’s value is a robust motivator to exert considerable efforts. “As a teacher I don’t feel that the upper managers appreciate our contributions in the teacher education system (T3). He, like other teachers such as T1, T2 and T4, denied receiving any requests from the upper authority to contribute to any review of the education policy.

It is necessary to probe the extent of frustrations that teachers are feeling toward their role in the school, especially when one hears comments such as “I feel that is unfair to most teachers;” or “That definitely depresses them [teachers] and kills their motivation towards teaching;” or “We as senior teachers are suffering a lot from the local system, and we hope that the Ministry takes action regarding this important issue.” No doubt, this frustration is passively reflected in the teaching/learning process.

To sum up, if PLC is to offer an opportunity for teachers’ professional development, principals and teachers must be involved dynamically in the entire teaching-learning system. They must participate actively in formulating standards, setting procedures, and analyzing collected data. That is what appears to be lacking in the current PLC system in Oman.

Leadership Role

For the implementation of PLC (or other policies) to be effective, those whose task it is to implement a policy must know and understand what they are supposed to do. Decrees, directions, and orders to execute the policy ought to be conveyed to the right people; moreover, they must be unambiguous, precise, and reliable. In essence, any uncertainty by implementers about their duty is likely to heighten the possibility that they would not implement a policy as intended by those who formulated it.

Despite that, the teachers interviewed perceived some shortcomings in the ability of their leaders, namely school principals, supervisors, senior teachers, to fulfill all the objectives of the PLC process. This defect in the leaders’ ability may be attributed to the lack of in-service training since the role of the PLC is not merely to steer the performance but also to upgrade the professional growth of the teacher. A more important factor affecting the PLC is to concentrate on efficiently training the leaders.

This situation may be attributed to the lack of clear, precise, and comprehensive role descriptions of both the principals and the teachers. A carefully developed and adequately comprehensive and defined description of the PLC – its aims, procedures, and performance expectations – is essential for generating a sound PLC system. Neglecting to define that and how the performance will be measured can weaken teachers’ achievement. Consequently, this situation could impede proper follow-up activity and, at worst, lead to an inappropriate decision



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

regarding a teacher's reputation.

Carefully developed and adequately defined PLC procedures are vital components to create a sound education system. These procedures serve as a guideline for teachers and principals alike to arrive at more accurate and precise results in the desired goal of PLC.

Collective Focus on Student Learning

In probing this issue, many teachers as well as principals responded that the teaching system is satisfied since teachers and principals are doing their job professionally. Teachers assume that the PLCs have the potential to motivate them to engage effectively in the teaching-learning process. One teacher confirmed this sentiment when she said: "There is acceptable room for involvement" (T2). This opinion has been confirmed by most of the participants.

Principal 3 opined: "My teachers are utilizing the PLC well by analyzing educational issues and getting benefit in their teaching." Principal 3 also corroborated the impact of PLC on teaching. In the words of Principal 1: "Since we are in the first cycle, a lot of strategies and pedagogies related to my teachers' lessons are available. They benefit a lot from PLC in planning, strategies, or instructional aids in school or outside school." Teachers 2, 4, and others have the same idea.

On the other hand, although most supervisors acknowledge the efforts exerted by teachers and principals in schools, they do not consider it sufficient. According to them, teachers and principals alike are doing their work by traditional methods that focus on the planning guidebook, student attendance, and so forth. Supervisors believe that if the teachers and school principals were to concentrate on the pupils' achievements there would be a dramatic change in the education level of the Sultanate. Moreover, they feel that the existing trend leads parents to get frustrated, so that most of them shift their kids to private schools where they can get a good education.

To sum up, based on what has been mentioned by the participants, they accept that sharing vision and values is likely to motivate teacher performance and, hopefully, affect teaching outcomes consequently. However, they criticize the extent to which their vision and values regarding the school system are being accommodated. These types of initiatives are very crucial in facilitating the execution of PLC to maximize their positive impact on TPD which is expressed in the answer of the second question.

Data Usage

While visiting schools, the researcher found that many teachers are involved in internet browsing. They confirmed that they use the data accessed from the MOE portal for formulating the action plan for student achievement. However, teachers are not happy about the amount of time allocated to collect data about student achievement.

According to the teachers, schools are full of activities that are not related to their core duty, which is teaching and learning, and these other activities have no positive impact on student achievement or behavior. They perceived these activities to constitute a heavy burden on them that impedes them from doing their core work. Many teachers call for a "comprehensive review of these activities" to confine them to the core work of the teacher. A teacher with nineteen years' experience described her suffering in this school thus:

We apply a number of series system in math. I—for instance—have to administer twelve exams to each student each semester and I also have to correct their homework. I have ninety students; can you imagine the amount of work that takes? That's not counting the students' portfolios and the other activities. In the face of such a tough job, how can the teacher develop professionally? It is impossible (T1).

In conclusion, teachers and principals raised the issue of the lack of time allocated to PLC and related activities. This, from their point of view, refers to the heavy burden of administrative responsibilities.



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

Teachers need to have comprehensive awareness concerning the way they can utilize their experiences to improve the current PLC system. Indeed, as interviewees asserted, they don't gain this chance, and in case they do, they participate only in limited issues that do not include formulating or reviewing the Ministry's policies.

The Second Question: The Schools' Facilities for PLCs

It is unquestionable that PLC results are aimed to be employed as a basis for designing and implementing in-service teachers' professional development programs. The Ministry of Education asserts:

In a rapidly changing world, teachers need to update and improve their own knowledge and methods throughout their career. This, along with the perceived inadequacies of pre-service training, has convinced the Ministry of Education that devising an appropriate model for the high-quality professional development of teachers is an essential component of the reform process (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 65).

In this regard, "Teacher professional development is considered as an integral part of the evaluation process" (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 33).

Regarding the substantial resources allocated for PLC, the study revealed that most of the participants were satisfied with the availability and abundance of these resources. The available substantial resources are in the form of funds, equipment, stationery, and furnished places for professional development activities.

Indeed, in Oman "educational aids were made available for all schools; school libraries and resource centers were provided with all their needs" (Ministry of Education, 2008a, p. 21). The budget of the Ministry of Education represents a high proportion of the general budget of the country. That entails precise consideration from the policy makers as well as the teachers themselves.

Moreover, training rooms that are utilized for professional improvement of teachers are presented. School principals asserted that sometimes training periods can even be organized when students are not present; for example, during school vacations, so that the classrooms and training rooms are vacant for use. These materials and facilities and more are available in every school in the Sultanate, and they are accessible to teachers as well as students.

Regarding the time allocated to the teacher to effectively pursue professional development and attend training sessions, the participants complain of heavy administrative burdens and the lack of time. Even though "the Ministry is keen on providing professional support to teachers by recruiting qualified administrators and supervisors to help teachers in performing their duties" (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 38), the heavy administrative responsibilities of the school crew hinder them from doing the core business of teaching/learning process. They criticize PLC is a complex issue and that, in addition to it, they must do countless irrelevant administrative tasks.

The interviewees whom the researcher met consistently pointed out that lack of time is the biggest challenge in PLC, which aims to promote teacher professional development and consequently shift from teaching to learning. This seems to be the situation in a range of schools. Principals and teachers also criticize the heavy administrative responsibilities on them, which weakens their capability to pursue the TPD. This certainly inhibits schools from looking for teaching quality and obstructs them from teachers' supervision and evaluation.

Regarding the senior teachers, their period is relatively high; therefore, they hardly have time to arrange a classroom visit. Sometimes they conduct the visit haphazardly regardless of pre-observation, deliberation, and feedback procedures. That situation affects the quality of PLC sessions in a negative way. A senior teacher described her case saying, "I have to teach twelve periods and I have to evaluate seven teachers; moreover, there are myriad administrative duties on our shoulders; so how can the senior teacher cope with this situation?" (ST2). Similarly, another senior teacher who is responsible for ten teachers considers the time insufficient since she has to teach seven periods weekly. She confirmed that a single classroom visit takes three to four periods, including pre-



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

observation, observation, and feedback. She said: "That doesn't include recording the reporting of the visit in the computer, which is sometimes being used, so I have to postpone this process to some other time and that is at the expense of my students and my other tasks" (ST3). Other participants – teachers and senior teachers – have almost the same responses.

Implementing PLC effectively is also time-demanding on school principals and supervisors as well. Another senior teacher commented:

Sometimes it [the time] is not enough, due to the heavy workload of management duties accumulated for me, such as attention to administrative, financial, social, and public relation affairs, in addition to shifts and other managerial affairs. This situation hinders me and my colleagues from implementing PLC as it is intended (ST1).

During the conduct of this study, the researcher acquired confirmation from many teachers that each one of them must teach an average of 20 to 25 periods. The time assigned for each teacher is restricted. It is tough to engage in PLC and pursue professional development in this case. As a result, the PLC is conducted in an unsuitable way. As a school principal declared, "The PLC, in most cases, takes place haphazardly" (SP3).

Effective PLC involves decreasing the duties of administrative issues on the shoulders of teachers, supervisors, senior teachers, and teachers. Teachers should allocate enough time to consider their own work and discover how to improve their classroom teaching. As emphasized by Alyahmadi (2012), policy makers "need to carefully review what is required of teachers to" reduce responsibilities. "Administrators ought to also reduce the administrative workload for" teachers, especially by "seeking to provide them with adequate time for nurturing teacher professional growth" (p. 212). In addition to professional development taking place in training centers, teachers require learning opportunities in their daily career. Considering that, educational system in Oman is relatively young, there is no comprehensive documents about the goals and strategies pertaining to PLC. Achieving this requirement requires some spare time during the workday.

DISCUSSION

The key purpose of this study was to investigate how PLC is being executed in educational settings in Oman. The Sultanate of Oman and its impact on teacher professional development. To offer a better understanding about these two issues these two questions, qualitative research was conducted utilizing document analysis, observation, and semi-structured interviews. It is widely accepted that, although the policy formulation and regulations enacted are important for sound PLC, its overall quality depends heavily on the way PLC is implemented. Analysis of the data on PLC and its impact on teacher professional development has provided useful insights into the actual implementation of the PLC system in the Sultanate of Oman. These findings can be categorized according to the research questions and theoretical framework as follows:

As indicated in the available resources, the two main purposes of PLC are teaching improvement and student performance. These two purposes are subdivided into more specific objectives such as: instructional improvement, professional development, and impact on students. This finding is consistent with the new paradigm of the task of PLC as an important means of improving teacher performance and promoting teacher development (Alyahmadi & Al-Shammakhi, 2021).

PLC in the Sultanate of Oman offers a good opportunity for teachers to effectively participate in the entire teaching-learning process. This participation takes several forms such as colleague observation, e.g., senior teacher, peer review, and teacher self-evaluation. Although teacher involvement is robustly recommended, there are certain obstacles preventing the success of these techniques, such as lack of teacher understanding of this technique, a difference between theory and practice, lack of time, and heavy teacher workloads (Al-Ani et.al, 2018; Al Seyabi, 2020 & Ministry of Education, 2016).



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

It can be concluded here that the main issue relating the implementation of PLC in Oman is the absence of a thorough documented framework that can be fully recognized by the teachers and the principals alike. The absence of a full PLC framework has caused a high level of ambiguity, especially in the issues pertaining to the purposes, procedures, means, and guidelines to be used.

For the purpose of discussion, the six elements comprising the theoretical framework can be collapsed under two main types. Type One comprises professional skills. The problems attendant to this type includes shortage of collaboration among the top and the bottom of the Ministry's structure, lack of involvement in the entire teaching-learning system, a deficiency of effective leaders to manage the PLC implementation and a lack of sufficient focus on student learning. The remaining factors such as deficiency of time allocated for implementing PLC activities, the burden of administrative duties, and lack of comprehensive PLC policy can be grouped under Type Two: institutional capacity. These two types are considered the main problems confronting the implementation of PLC in Omani schools.

Professional Skills

Pertaining to school-based collaboration, most teachers expressed high satisfaction with the interaction and collaboration among teachers and between teachers and principals. This type of communication is vital to success in the learning/teaching process. Teamwork, peer review, and mutual dialogue are inspiring initiatives that enhance classroom practice and promote student achievement.

The interviewees assert that the school principals have little power to control their schools. Their responses indicate deep frustration regarding the lack of power principals possess to make decisions regarding teacher work such as encouraging and promoting good teachers and controlling the PLC system. That is one of the negative effects of centralization in the educational system. Granting the school principals such power in a system of checks and balances has the potential to enhance school performance as well as promote administrators' and teachers' motivation and satisfaction.

Regarding the selection of the school leaders, all the interviewees confirmed that the selection of the supervisors, school principals, and senior teachers is conducted at a high level of objectivity and professionalism.

Despite that, the teachers interviewed perceived some shortcomings in the ability of leaders to fulfill all the objectives of the PLC process. This situation has the potential to impede proper follow-up activity or, at worst, lead to incorrect decisions regarding teacher professional development. This defect in the evaluators' ability may be attributed to the lack of in-service training since the role of the PLC and its impact on teacher professional development is not crystal clear for the decision makers in the Ministry. An important aspect of a great PLC system is the focus on successfully training the stakeholders. Any successful PLC system should include guidelines for principals and teachers to be aware about a range of good teaching methods, the learning-teaching psychology, and the impact of teacher development on student achievement (Alyahmadi, 2012).

Teachers do not object in principle to PLC in their schools; however, they call for greater focus on the way PLC is being implemented in schools. Some teachers had reservations about the behavioral patterns of some principals and supervisors, i.e., routine methods of supervision, traditional emphasis on pursuing faults, and lack of informative feedback and productive dialogue. These behaviors have led to a state of indifference among teachers toward the implementation process. For principals and supervisors to make a positive impact on teacher growth, they must achieve and maintain two essential characteristics: credibility and trustworthiness (Mathers et al., 2008; Elmore, 2000; and Darling-Hammond et al., 1983). Principals and supervisors acquire credibility by expanding their relevant knowledge and skills. Trustworthiness, on the other hand, depends on an evaluator's steadiness of decision making, maintaining confidentiality of reports, and avoiding bias while evaluating performance.



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

Institutional Capacity

The policy maker interviewed stated that school principals and teachers had some involvement in policy components such as purposes, strategies, and procedures. However, school principals and teachers reported either a lack of involvement opportunity or uncertainty about the impact of their involvement. This inconsistency reveals the complexity of the communication between the top and the bottom of the institution. This ignorance of stakeholders' opinions conflicts with the aforementioned documented policy of the education system, which asserts that the process of establishing purposes, standards, and procedures in the Omani system involves key stakeholders: teachers, administrators, and policy makers. It is well established that the policy requires monitoring of its implementation in order to ensure achievement of the purposeful goals.

PLC in Oman has a small influence on TPD. Teachers and principals alike asserted that they realize positive progress in their performance in many facets of their specialization, but this progress is not worth the effort, budget, and time allocated. Teachers in Oman are being solicited to "develop skills and attitudes that encourage autonomies and cooperative learning, communication, critical thinking, problem solving, research and investigation techniques, creativeness, innovation and the development of an aesthetic sense" (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 26). Attaining these high standards initiatives involves:

(a) upgrading institutional endeavors required to boost lifelong TPD;

(b) regularly, appraising the existing PLC purposes, strategies, and trends to verify its matching with new concepts of teacher learning; and

(c) rising teachers' insights on their own professional development and its importance in facing their teaching obstacles (Alyahmadi, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Studying the implementation of PLC is vital to grasp the impact of this system on the learning-teaching procedures as well as its impact on teacher professional development. The current study has revealed a significant number of deep issues relating to the execution of PLC that are affecting the whole educational system in Oman. Three particularly weak points were discovered in the implementation of PLC that may threaten the viability of the system.

First, there are not enough training programs for teachers, principals, and supervisors. Those that do occur are not well designed to meet the teachers' requirements. Second, there is a lack of involvement in the entire teaching-learning system. The third point is that principals and teachers are all severely saddled with administrative responsibilities that hinder them from concentrating on the growing implications of PLC.

This study clarifies the conditions that create obstacles to implementation of policy resulting in result in increased student success and student learning. These weak points do not necessarily mean that the implementation of PLC in Oman is doomed to failure. These issues ought to, however, inform the heads in the Ministry that a significant gap exists between the Ministry's ambition of spreading PLC in all the regions and its actual implementation.

REFERENCES

- Al-Ani, W., Al-Sulaimani, H., Al-Harathi, A., Al-Munthiri, R. & Al-Seyabi, F. (2018). Decision-Making in Light of Teaching Code of Ethics: Perceptions of Omani School Educators. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Studies*, 12(2), 321- 339.
- Al Seyabi, F. (2020). Values and dispositions of Omani novice teachers as perceived by school principals and assistant principals. *Higher Education Studies*, 10 (4).
- Alyahmadi, H. & Al-kiyumi, A. (2014). The impact of teacher evaluation on teacher professional development in Oman. *International Journal of Education and Research (IJER)*, 2(4), 127- 142.



MALAYSIAN ONLINE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT (MOJEM)

- Alyahmadi, H. & Al-Sammakhi, K. (2021). Professional learning communities in basic and post-basic schools in Muscat, Oman: The need for time and supported leadership. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 9(4), 81-96.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 57-71). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Caine, G., & Caine, R. (2010). *Strengthening and enriching your professional learning community: The art of learning together*. ASCD.
- Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. J. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, 41(5), 545-547.
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2012). *Essentials for principals the school leader's guide to professional learning communities at work (Essentials for principals)*. Solution Tree Press.
- Farrell, T. S. (2015). *Reflective language teaching: From research to practice*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Hunter, A., & Brewer, J. (2015). Designing multimethod research. In S. Hesse-Biber & R. B. Johnson (Eds.), *The oxford handbook of multimethod and mixed methods research inquiry* (pp. 185–205). Oxford University Press
- Ministry of Education (2016). *Oman education framework for excellence*. Sultanate of Oman.
- Punch, K. F. (2013). *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Razi, N., & Kargar, A. A. (2014). Evaluation of in-service foreign language teacher education program in Iran. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World*, 5(1), 221-236.
- Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality and Quantity*, 52(4), 1893–1907.
- Talbert, J. E. (2010). *Professional learning communities at the crossroads: How systems hinder or engender change*. Springer Netherlands.
- Tschannen-Moran, M. (2014). *Trust matters: Leadership for successful schools* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Yin, R. (2014). *Applications of case study research: Design and methods*: Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.