# The Influence of Instructional Leadership on Professional Learning Communities Practices
### (Pengaruh Kepimpinan Instruksional Terhadap Amalan Komuniti Pembelajaran Profesional)

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ABSTRACT

Instructional leadership plays a particular role in school since its role has always been to impact effective teaching and learning processes. Instructional leadership practices is essential in promoting professional development among teachers. Professional learning communities (PLCs) are recognized as one of effective organization practice involving collaborative learning to improve school performance. This paper emphasize the importance of promoting collaborative learning among teachers by instructional school leaders. Therefore, this conceptual paper aims to discuss the influence of instructional leadership practices among school leaders towards PLCs practices. Hence, issues and challenges in implementing PLCs in schools are discussed. As a result, this conceptual paper offers insights with implications for policy, practice, and training. The policy makers should emphasize the encouragement of PLCs implementation to promotes its beneficial practice for school performance. Besides, school leaders should focus on instructional leadership strategies that highlight best practices to promote collaborative learning opportunities for professional development among teachers. This paper also underscores the significance of equipping school leaders with the necessary skills to foster a positive school climate, thereby enhancing the successful implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) among teachers. In conclusion, instructional leadership plays an important role in supporting the PLCs implementation in school.

Keywords: education, educational leadership, instructional leadership, professional learning, professional learning communities, PLCs

ABSTRAK

Kepimpinan instruksional memainkan peranan penting dalam memberi impak terhadap proses pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang berkesan. Amalan kepimpinan instruksional penting bagi menggalakkan pembangunan profesional dalam kalangan guru. Komuniti pembelajaran profesional (PLC) diiktiraf sebagai salah satu amalan pembelajaran kolaboratif dalam organisasi yang berkesan untuk meningkatkan prestasi sekolah. Kertas konsep ini menekankan kepentingan pemimpin instruksional di sekolah dalam menggalakkan kolaborasi dan peluang pembelajaran guru di sekolah. Oleh itu, kertas konsep ini bertujuan membincangkan amalan kepimpinan instruksional pemimpin sekolah dalam mempengaruhi amalan komuniti pembelajaran profesional guru. Justeru, isu dan cabaran dalam melaksanakan PLC di sekolah dibincangkan. Hasil perbincangan memberikan implikasi terhadap aspek dasar pendidikan, amalan dan latihan. Implikasi dalam aspek dasar pendidikan menekankan galakan terhadap pelaksanaan PLC yang penting dalam meningkatkan prestasi sekolah. Selain itu, implikasi dari sudut amalan memberi fokus kepada pemimpin sekolah dalam melaksanakan strategi kepimpinan instruksional dengan menonjolkan amalan-amalan baik dalam bilik darjah dan mewujudkan iklim pembelajaran kolaboratif guru-guru bagi pembangunan profesional mereka. Implikasi dari sudut latihan pula menekankan peranan institusi penyedia latihan bagi melengkapkan pemimpin sekolah dengan kemahiran yang diperlukan untuk memupuk iklim sekolah yang positif, bagi meningkatkan keberkesanan pelaksanaan PLC di sekolah. Kesimpulannya, amalan kepimpinan instruksional memainkan peranan penting dalam menyokong pelaksanaan PLC di sekolah.

Kata kunci: pendidikan, kepimpinan pendidikan, kepimpinan instruksional, pembelajaran profesional, komuniti pembelajaran profesional, PLC

# INTRODUCTION

The focus on principals' instructional leadership practices and their relationship with teachers' job performance has attracted a lot of interest in the field of educational research. Several studies have emphasized the importance of instructional leadership practices in affecting teacher effectiveness and that will contribute to student performance. Therefore, the role of principals in providing professional development among teachers is crucial to enhance teacher's capabilities. Studies indicate that effective professional development plays a crucial role in enhancing teachers' knowledge of instructional methods and content. One of the professional development approaches in school is professional learning communities (Meesuk et al. 2021). PLCs promote collaborative learning which has becoming an interest among policy makers and school leaders (Huijboom et al. 2021). Many studies have found that schools implementing PLCs witness a significant improvement in teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. One of the most notable advantages of PLCs is enabling teachers to collaborate to share best practices and identify areas for improvement. This collaborative approach to learning and problem-solving enables educators to work together to enhance student outcomes and ensure their schools provide a high-quality educational experience.

PLCs offer several benefits for teachers, schools, and students. According to Mohd Yusoff and Ismail (2019), PLCs are an effective way to support teacher professional development and improve student outcomes. Research has consistently shown that teachers who actively participate in PLCs are significantly more inclined to incorporate effective teaching practices. As this practical approach enables teachers to collaborate in sharing best practices, the school leaders play an important role in promoting a positive school culture to support the implementation of PLCs in school. As a result, the school leaders should balance their responsibilities as instructional leaders with their operational responsibilities to effectively oversee the schools' networks, infrastructure, and human resources (Hallinger et al. 2020). More specifically, in order to accomplish academic goals and foster a supportive atmosphere for effective teaching and learning, principals have an ongoing duty to develop pedagogical tools and strategies based on a common school vision (Sebastian et al. 2019). Although leadership roles are clearly defined, investigating methods that align with this understanding could offer significant insights into school leadership accountability, wherein school leaders are anticipated to be proficient instructional leaders. Therefore, proactive school leadership practices are needed to support the implementation of PLC in schools. Previous studies have shown that instructional leadership will support effective PLCs implementation in school. Hence, the instructional leadership practices in influencing PLCs implementation in school will be discussed.

# INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Leadership strategy is an important element in school administration to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of school management. School leadership indirectly influences student achievement through the development of collaborative learning in school (Hallinger et al. 2020). It is acknowledged by the empowerment notion that school leaders are in the best position to make decisions that are appropriate for the given environment, promote good change, and support academic excellence (Wang 2018). A study conducted by Acton (2021) agreed that school leaders play a vital role in implementing school reforms. The leadership of school principals has garnered significant global attention as it represents a significant factor in comprehending school efficacy (Hallinger et al. 2013; Zheng et al. 2017; Lai et al. 2017).

One of the practices of leadership style that is still relevant to practice in order to achieve an organizational goal is instructional leadership (Dayangku Rodzianah & Mohd Izham 2021). Various definitions of instructional leadership have been proposed. However, all of these definitions share a common thread, emphasizing that principal leadership practices should prioritize student learning objectives, retain a strong focus on teacher training and professional development, and aim to increase teachers' instructional skills. definitions of instructional leadership have been established. However, all these definitions share a common theme in emphasizing that principal leadership practices should prioritize student learning outcomes, maintain a strong focus on teacher instruction and professional development, and work to enhance teachers' instructional skills (Hayes & Irby 2019). There are studies that show the principal's instructional leadership has an impact on teachers' professional learning (Shengnan & Hallinger 2021). School leaders are responsible for building a proactive team of teachers to lead efforts to improve student achievement (Zepeda 2014).

# PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have become increasingly popular as a means to support teacher professional development and enhance learning outcomes. Recent studies related to PLCs support its effectiveness in

enhancing teacher professional development and student success in Malaysia. Mohamed and Abdul Rahman (2020) found that PLCs is effective in enhancing teacher professional development and student success in Malaysia. This is because there is an increase in collaboration, shared ownership of school goals, and a more supportive working environment among teachers participating in PLCs. This positive development leads to improved student achievement and a more positive school culture. According to Oliver, Hipp, & Huffman (2010), PLCs are collaborative and ongoing groups of educators working to improve their collective practices and student learning outcomes. Professional learning communities in schools serves as an effort in strengthening the knowledge and skills and school improvement practices of community members (Syed Abdullah 2020). Collaborative learning, ongoing reflection, and the sharing of professional practices introduced in PLCs practices (Dehdary 2017). According to Hoaglund et al. (2014), PLCs can be defined more elaborately as a collaborative effort by a group of educators collaborative learning. Furthermore, Hoaglund et al. (2014) suggest that teachers should regularly meet to review and improve their goals and use formative data to assess their progress in sustaining effective PLCs. Teachers can enhance their knowledge and abilities through collaborative practices in PLC, which ultimately leads to higher student accomplishment (Zanaton et al. 2021).

## INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP IN PROMOTING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

School leaders play an essential role in facilitating teacher involvement in professional development through supportive leadership practices. This includes the efforts in providing time, resources, and collaborative opportunities, in promoting teacher professionalism through active engagement in professional learning (MacLeod 2020). Wilson (2016) asserts that members should collectively manage PLCs to contribute to school improvement, where teacher collaboration in PLCs through the adaptation or generation of new ideas can enhance student learning. A study conducted by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (2019) found that PLCs are an effective way to support teachers' professional development and enhance student success in Malaysia. Trust and collaboration can be achieved by encouraging open and honest communication, encouraging teachers to share their practices and experiences, and creating opportunities for teachers to collaborate. This is supported by Chong et al. (2018), who found that administrative attitudes influence PLC practices. Some administrators exhibit closed-minded attitudes, lack

of innovation and creativity, inadequate motivation of school members to pursue excellence, and continue to practice autocratic leadership in implementing PLCs at schools. Furthermore, a study by Zuraidah et al. (2017) found that school management policies and administration, such as inefficient principals, pose challenges to the implementation of PLCs in schools, which needs to be addressed to enable teachers and schools to benefit from PLCs implementation. This is because professional learning communities represent a structure that provides opportunities for teachers and school leaders to collaborate (Hairon & Tan 2016).

Similar findings were made by Dede and Richards (2018), who discovered that instructional leadership strategies emphasizing coaching and feedback might effectively foster the professional development of teachers. A vital component of instructional leadership is encouraging the formation of PLCs and offering teachers continual professional development opportunities and support (Sasan, 2021). Therefore, instructional leadership is highly relevant to enhance PLCs practices among teachers. Farrel et al. (2020) argued that effective instructional leaders play a crucial role in promoting and supporting PLCs development, which in turn leads to improved teacher practices and student achievement. School leaders should have knowledge of best practices in education, especially in facilitating effective learning, and have the ability to foster a culture of trust and collaboration among teachers. Hence, the implementation of PLCs in schools is highly influenced by instructional leadership practices of the school leaders and requires effective workflow management by school leaders.

## ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

PLCs implementation has potential to improve student learning and change the educational landscape. However, fostering this collaborative learning approach seems to necessitate several conditions. Adequate resources, including access to technology, professional development opportunities, and supportive leadership are essential in supporting teachers as they collaborate to improve student learning outcomes (Scott & Kruse 2017). Therefore, effective professional learning communities need to be supported by sufficient resources and chances to encourage teacher cooperation. However, one of the biggest obstacles to teachers establishing PLCs is a lack of resources. Teachers confront a key problem due to uncommon resources, as per research conducted by Woolf and Harris (2018). It is argued that in the absence of adequate

resources, such as technology and opportunity for professional development, teachers struggle to collaborate effectively and pursue ongoing improvement. Teachers in professional learning communities (PLCs) confront a key problem due to scarce resources, as per research conducted by Woolf and Harris (2018). It is argued that in the absence of adequate resources, such as technology and opportunity for professional development, teachers struggle to collaborate effectively and pursue ongoing improvement. This is also in line with Haiyan and Allan (2021), who highlight the importance of resources in fostering productive teacher collaboration in PLCs.

Besides, Tahir and Musah (2020) argued that teachers seem to have negative attitudes towards PLCs. Some teachers prefer to work alone rather than work as a team. This may be due to lack of social skills among them to share best practice among colleagues (Puspanathan & Mahaliza 2020). Therefore, school leaders need to have initiatives to create a positive organization climate so that teachers can improve their working style and improve their professional skills in school.

Next, implementing effective PLCs in schools encounter problems due to incompetency of school leaders. This is supported by several studies which indicate that there are principals who are not competent in implementing PLCs in schools (Kamarudin et al. 2020). According to Chong et al. (2019), school leaders still lack competence in leadership. This is because school leaders are still unclear about instructional responsibilities (Bada et al. 2020). Some school leaders still prioritize administrative tasks over instructional aspects which can lead to a positive learning environment in schools (Ithnin & Abdullah 2018). Yang et al. (2020) also added that there is a need to enhance the knowledge of best organization practices among instructional school leaders. Moreover, a study conducted in Malaysia emphasized that there are school leaders who are not open-minded, less efficient, less innovative, less creative and do not give freedom to teachers to make decisions adding to the difficulty of implementing PLCs practices in schools (Keong et al. 2018).

## IMPLICATIONS

The challenges of PLC implementation give implication to the policy makers in promoting PLCs in school. As PLCs is highlighted as one of the initiatives to improve teacher capacity. PLCs implemation should be emphasized especially for the school leaders. This will alarm the school leaders to sustain the PLCs implementation in school. The importance and guideline need to be highlighted to help the school leaders to plan an appropriate strategies according to their school climates.

Effective PLCs are difficult to be achieved without competent principals who leads the implementation process in schools. Therefore, school leaders should play a role in providing the necessary resources and support for teachers to implement more effective PLCs in order to achieve the desired goals. Instructional school leaders have to create a positive environment in schools for to encourage teachers to enhance their professional development. These highlight the importance of instructional leadership practices in addressing challenges faced in the implementation of PLCs. School leaders need to be actively involved in implementing PLCs to support teachers and ultimately improve student learning outcomes. School leaders should act to plan and conduct strategies accordingly by providing the necessary resources and support to enhance effective collaboration within professional learning communities.

Additionally, district and state education departments also need to act by consistently providing supervision and mentorship for the school instructional leaders especially in managing PLCs practices in school. Collaboration between school leaders and district or state education departments can enhance the successful implementation of PLCs in pursuit of established objectives. This allows the school leaders to implement instructional leadership efficiently that will result in effective PLCs practices.

Next, this study also provides implications in training support. Educational training providers need to provide training for the school leaders especially to incorporate PLCs management in instructional leadership practices in school. This is important to allow school leaders to get an overview of the challenges and appropriate action in leading change in school organization. This is also important in creating awareness and providing knowledge related to actions required to encourage teacher collaboration that will contribute to the teachers' professional development.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, instructional leadership plays an important role to influence PLCs practices among teachers. Therefore, various party involves and need to contribute in order to achieve an effective PLCs implementation. Furthermore, it is expected that the above discussion will provide ideas and space for further research on the relationship between instructional leadership and PLC practices in schools.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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