

The Mediating Effect of Professional Learning Communities between Leadership Engagements and Quality of Teaching in Maldives

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ABSTRACT

Background - The deteriorating educational quality is among the challenges in the Maldivian education sector. Professional learning communities (PLC) and school leadership are positive interventions that can upgrade teachers and teaching processes. The paper is a systematic literature review and offer an integrated framework to illuminate mediating effect of PLC on leadership engagement and teaching quality, in Maldives.

Method – The review of articles from 7 databases between 2018 and 2020, under four main search terms followed a PRISMA statement and a study protocol as a guide.

Findings – A framework is proposed to understand the impact of PLC on leadership engagement and teaching quality, in Maldives.

Limitations – As PLC is a context-sensitive concept, the limited number of articles from Asian Region, specifically in Maldives, may reduce the relevance of the findings

Originality – The integrated framework may assist the policy makers to use PLCs to transform the quality of teaching in Maldives.

Keywords

Professional learning communities, School leadership, Leadership engagement, Teaching practice, Teaching quality

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Introduction

The quality of education or teaching and learning in Maldives remain as a challenging subject which has been slowly and steadily gaining the attention of scholars (Policy Planning and Research Division, 2019). Myriad problems in curriculum implementation, teaching pedagogies and classroom managements techniques are witnessed in schools across the country (Quality Assurance Department, 2018). Hence, understanding the undermine factors affecting the quality of teaching becomes substantial in the field of education in Maldives.

Empirical evidence suggests that educational quality greatly depends on the quality of teachers and their professional advancement is critical to raise the standard of education (The World Bank, 2018). However, the literature in this domain criticizes the weak teacher training programs as common problems in Asian Region, for the deteriorating standards of teaching (UNICEF, 2018). The current professional development sessions conducted in the schools in Maldives, too, turned out to be ineffective in bringing any momentous change in the teaching practices in classrooms (Quality Assurance Department, 2018). On the other hand, Professional learning communities or PLCs is concept broadly followed in western countries for improving the knowledge and skills of teachers (Ismail et al., 2020; Derk, 2020; Chua et al., 2020; Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). Yet, this topic needs further exploration and acceptance in the context of Maldives, in relation to quality of teaching (Mohamed et al., 2018).

The impact of leadership engagement on PLC also appeared to be powerful and straightforward in the lights of literature (Godlesky & Elizabeth, 2018). There are growing appeals towards the significant role of school leadership in setting

the environment, culture and conditions required for the PLCs to be successfully implemented (Chua et al., 2020).

Despite numerous researches on the impact of leadership and PLCs on the quality of teaching, the lack of an integrated model leaves a theoretical gap for a comprehensive understanding of their influence on each other when PLC serves as a mediating factor (Boylan et al., 2018; Godlesky & Elizabeth, 2018; Ismail et al., 2020; Derk, 2020). The study therefore, intends to provide a theoretical overview to address the gap to illuminate the mediating effect of professional learning communities on leadership engagement and teaching quality, in Maldives.

The study would yield significant practical advantages for policy makers to transform the traditional professional development into consistent and productive technical support for teachers. It would also support the school leaders to direct their leadership engagements towards effective professional learning communities as a mean to improvise the teaching practices. Besides, this study would be a contribution to new knowledge of literature in the field of education in Maldives.

Method

The study followed secondary data from online platforms to get a thorough understanding of the previous literature in the domain of teaching quality, professional learning communities and school leadership. Several theories and models by different researchers and scholars were critically reviewed to identify the impact of the three factors on each other. A PRISMA statement which consisted of the title, a structured abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion and conclusion was followed as a guideline for the review paper (Snyder, 2019 and Daniel, 2019). The process followed; searching and identifying articles, filtering irrelevant publication, organizing and consolidating

researches, synthesizing in tabulated forms and critically analyzing contribution to the subject matter. The method followed a review framework which included the study protocol (PICOC), eligibility criteria (time duration, language), study selection (inclusion and exclusion), information sources (databases), search strategy (search terms), data collection (data extraction) and result synthesis (data analysis). Thereafter, a framework was established to display the mediating effect of professional learning communities on leadership engagement and quality of teaching.

Results

Study protocol

The study protocol focused on the study scope, searched sources, searched strategy, data extraction, data analysis.

Study Scope

The study scope was decided on the PICOC framework presented by Mengista et al. (2019) which consisted of the population, intervention, comparison, outcomes and context. The population included articles which discussed the leadership engagement, PLC, and the quality of teaching practices, in the primary and secondary level of education. Papers with professional learning community discussion were considered as the intervention. Those that were comparing relationship between leadership engagement, PLC and quality of teaching practices were then included in the review. The outcomes were evaluated based on six parameters mentioned in table.3 with the information extraction. As the concept of PLC is a developing topic, papers from all over the world were accepted.

Searched Sources

Articles were accessed from academic databases and search engines including Educational Resources Information Center, Research Gate, Google Scholar, BASE, Springer Links, Elsevier, and Academic Search.

Search Strategy

The search terms used to access the articles included; ‘traditional professional learning models’ OR ‘characteristics of PLC’ OR ‘PLC practices’ OR ‘impact of PLC on teaching quality’ OR ‘impact of leadership engagement on PLC implementation’, based on the following eligibility criteria;

Table 1: The Eligibility Criteria

Content	Description
Date	2018 – 2020
Published	
Language restriction	English

Search themes Traditional professional learning models, PLC characteristics, Impact of PLC on teaching quality, PLC practices, Impact of leadership practices on PLC implementation

The papers accessed were then considered based on the following inclusion and exclusion criteria in table.2.

Table 2: The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Decision
The search terms are found in title, abstract or among keywords	Included
The papers peer-reviewed journal	Included
The content showed relation between at least two factors under investigation	Included
The paper addressed at least one of the three variables	Included
Duplicate papers	Excluded
The full texts cannot be accessed	Excluded
Did not meet the time period	Excluded

Source: Adapted from Snyder (2019) and Daniel (2019)

The review identified researches on the concept of PLC. The characteristics of PLC, PLC practices, and its impact on the quality of teaching practices were explored. Articles with terms such as ‘educational quality and PLC’, ‘quality of education and PLC’, ‘PLC and quality of teaching and learning processes’ or ‘learning organization’, were all considered relevant. Publications which presented other areas related to PLC such as the challenges and benefits of implementing PLC in schools, were also excluded. Thereafter, publications on the association of PLC and school leadership were explored. Researches which focused on ‘Principal leadership and PLC’, ‘Administrative leadership and PLC’ or ‘Teacher leadership and PLC’ were treated under the same umbrella ‘leadership engagement and PLC’ and included in the review. However, the researches which linked PLC with other factors such as school condition, school culture, students or community were regarded as irrelevant for the current study and was excluded. The articles were chosen as applicable based on their title, abstract and introduction. The reason for the time span limit from 2018 to 2020, was to obtain the latest published articles under the concept.

As the next step, the selected articles were read carefully and analyzed critically to understand the impact of the three factors; leadership engagement, PLC and quality of teaching, on each other. The important information such as authors, published year, title, study setting, outcomes and identified gaps were extracted, and tabulated, in the table 3 below. The final dataset included 16 out of the 70 publications identified; 15 journal articles, and one conference proceedings. The synchronized findings were discussed in the next section. The search and selection process are displayed in Figure.1, below.

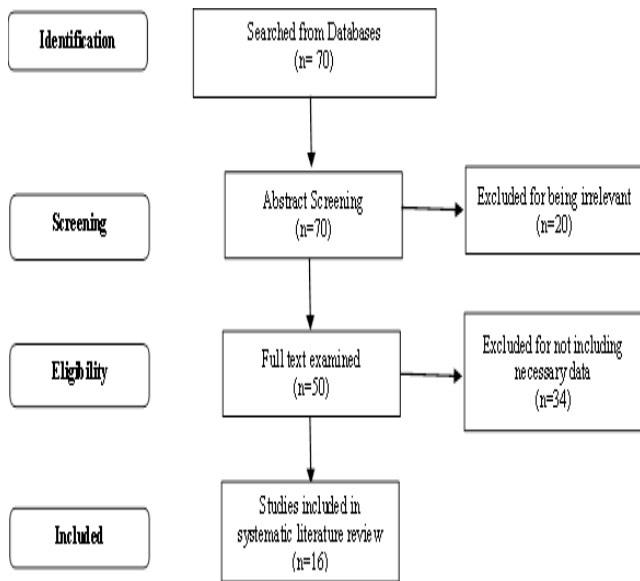


Figure 1: The flow chart of the searching and selection process

Source: Adapted from Snyder (2019) and Daniel (2019)

Data Extraction and Synthesis

After a critical analysis of the selected articles, the relevant data were extracted and categorized based on six parameters; author, published year, study focused country, source, identified gaps, and outcomes. The table 3, below shows the extracted information which were categorized by using the coding criteria discussed.

Data Analysis

The data were then analyzed based on descriptive, and thematic analysis..

Category	Paper 1	Paper 2	Paper 3	Paper 4	Paper 5	Paper 6	Paper 7	Paper 8
Author	David Olsson	Benedicte Vanblaere and Geert Devos	Christina Papadakou	Ahmed Mohamed, Ahmad Zabidi Abdul Razak, and Zuraidah Abdullah	John Lawson Russell	Marco Kools, Louise Stoll, Bert George, Bram Steijn4 Victor Bekkers, Pierre Gouédard	Aikaterini Stavroula Tsalidi	Mark Boylan, Mike Coldwell, Bronwen Maxwell & Julie Jordan
Published Year	2019	2018	2018	2018	2018	2020	2019	2018
Study Focused Country	Sweden	Belgium	Finland and Greece	Maldives	Columbia	Paris, France	Greek	UK
Source	Karlstad University Studies	SAGE Journals	Spring Term	International Online Journal of Educational Leadership		Wiley Online Library	Spring Term	Taylor & Francis Online
Identified Gaps	Association between PLC, leadership & teaching quality highlighted separately Raise the need for integration but No integrated framework	Association between PLC, leadership & teaching quality highlighted separately Only department leaders and teacher leaders highlighted under leadership No integrated framework	Association between PLC, leadership & teaching quality highlighted separately No integrated framework	Association between PLC, leadership & teaching quality highlighted separately Only department leaders and teacher leaders highlighted under leadership No integrated framework	Association between PLC, teacher leadership & teaching quality highlighted separately Only teacher leadership highlighted under leadership No integrated framework	Association of PLC & teaching quality highlighted leadership impact ignored No integrated framework	Association between PLC, leadership & teaching quality highlighted separately No integrated framework	PD promotes student learning The effect of school's environment and external stimuli highlighted No specific relation shown between Leadership – PLC-teaching
Outcome	PLC should be an integrated, ongoing part of school, adapted to context, collaborative & reflective inquiry, shared vision, collective responsibility, mentorship & coaching Principal and Administrative leadership should develop teacher leadership, top-down support drive bottom-up change, set & facilitate condition, set policies, spur teachers – time, space, incentives, ensure proper measures, open dialogue, share leadership, collegiality & trust	Department leaders play a lead role in shaping PLC in departments, develop teacher leadership – most influential leadership, literature is scarce Development-oriented leadership – professional development opportunities, reflective dialogues, sharing knowledge & skills, empowering others, coaching new teachers, follow student development Group-oriented leadership – collective platform, allied subjects have homogeneous groups, collaboration, collegial environment, coordinating, mutual alignment, positive relationship	Schools as learning organizations – learn at 3 levels; classrooms, school, community Clear & meaningful mission & vision, collaboration embedded culture, systematic strategies involving students, parents & staff in decision-making, supportive policies & strategies Characteristics of PLC - Shared Values and Vision, Collective responsibility, Reflective professional inquiry, Collaboration, Promotion of group and individual learning, Mutual trust, Inclusive membership, Openness, networks and partnerships Leading PLC- A culture of learning, Multilevel learning, Distributed leadership, Management & Coordination, Empower the Human Resource, Trust and positive climate, Time, Space and School Structure, Support	Developmental focus and collegiality lead to collaboration, reflection, experimentation, and reaching out to knowledge base	Teachers can act as leaders and facilitators, actively engage, lead to ambitious teaching, build trust, encourage & empower others, raises their own voices Practice-based PLC – teachers collaborate, within the context of classroom, coherently connect class practices, share boundary artifacts (student work, LP, assessments, videos, case studies, cognitive levels in classrooms) – reflective dialogues, share values, norms, ownership of problems	Shared vision, contributing to school's vision, continuous learning opportunities, collaboration, inquiry learning, innovation & exploration, exchanging knowledge & learning, learning from and with external environment, modelling learning leadership	Teacher collaboration & collegial relationship Direct involvement of Principal & administrators – balance, motivate, provide guidance & stability Base for collaboration – proper infrastructure, proper training, guidance, curriculum reform, flexible teaching strategies, timeframe Good school climate – mutual understanding, teacher attitude, leading, modelling & guidance by Principals Teacher role – subject/mainstream teachers' gap, male/female gap	Guskey (2002) - teachers' classroom practices; change in students' learning outcomes Desimone (2009) - increased teacher knowledge and skills, attitudes and beliefs, change in instruction, student learning Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) - external domain; domain of practice; domain of consequence; and personal domain Opfer and Pedder (2011) - sub-systems: the teacher, the school; and the learning activity system Evans (2014) - behavioral, attitudinal and intellectual development

Table 3: Information Extraction Tabl

Category	Paper 9	Paper 10	Paper 11	Paper 12	Paper 13	Paper 14	Paper 15
Author	Wilfried Admiraal, Wouter Schenke, Loes De Jong, Yolande Emmelot & Henk Sligte	Andy Hargreaves and Michael T O'Connor	Brenda R. Brand	Wei Chuan Chua et al.	Kamarudin Ismail, Rosnah Ishak, Siti Hajjar Kamaruddin	Tiong Ngee Derk	Nor Azlin Ibrahim, Mohd Izham Mohd Hamzah and JamalulLail Abdul Wahab
Published Year	2019	2018	2020	2020	2020	2019	2020
Study Focused Country	Netherlands	Australia	USA	Malaysia	Malaysia	Malaysia	Malaysia
Source	Taylor's & Francis Online	Center for Strategic Education	International Journal of STEM Education	SAGE and Open Access Journal	Universal Journal of Educational Research	Malaysian Journal of ELT Research	International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology
Identified Gaps	Association between PLC, leadership & teaching quality highlighted separately No integrated framework	Association between PLC, leadership & teaching quality highlighted separately No integrated framework	Impact of teacher leadership, and collaboration on teaching quality shown but integration of the three not shown Only two components of PLC focused mediating effect of PLC can be explored	When lead role is limited the impact of PLC is unsuccessful Mediating effect of PLC on leadership and quality can be explored PLC researches in Asia limited – could contribute to literature	Characteristics of PLC were widely adapted from the Western PLC model Scope to study the concept in the context of Maldives	impact of leadership & PLC / PLC & quality was highlighted but integration of the three not highlighted - mediating effect of PLC can be explored scope - align with the norms in the contexts – can study in Maldivian context	impact of leadership & PLC / PLC & quality was highlighted but integration of the three not highlighted - mediating effect of PLC can be explored
Outcome	Teacher groups – collaboration, learning together, formal/informal learning, peer observation, review, knowledge networks, learning labs. To sustain programs – need to be embedded in school culture – leadership role	Collaboration – improve student learning, circulate knowledge, improve competencies Collaborative Professionalism – strong relationship, deep & demanding dialogue, constructive feedback, continuous collaborative inquiry, embedded in culture, have solidarity, take risks, make mistakes Teacher-led collaboration – collaborative planning network – who teach same grade, same curriculum, same class area Leads to collective efficacy, distributive leadership Collaboration is a necessity and leadership role are important	Teachers positioned as leaders Collaborative involvement of teachers Helped the students in inquiry-based learning	Teacher interactions remained scarce, occasional model classes, sharing restricted to friends PLC – twice or quarterly a year and no follow up done Unsuccessful PLC Limited leadership No contribution to teaching quality	Added value to the improvement of teaching skills and to enhance teacher competencies Focused on western context leadership characteristics, and the teachers themselves are influential	PLC improves student learning, student motivation, teacher-efficacy, job satisfaction, instructional innovation, job involvement, team performance school leadership can hinder or stimulate PLC implementation context-sensitive	Significant relationship between the transformational leadership and PLC practices provide positive impact to the teaching and learning of teachers and students

Discussions

The review of the papers extracted information on five main themes which are represented in the figure.2 below;

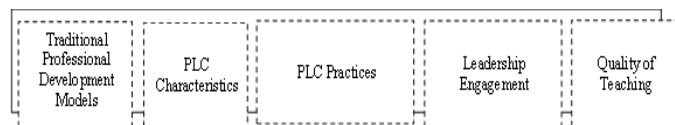


Figure 2: The main themes derived from the content

Source: Developed from Literature Review

A Review of Traditional Professional Learning Models

A critical analysis of the five traditional models summarized by Boylan et al. (2018), was carried out to understand they are suitable for the professional development of teachers and teaching processes. The models were examined to understand the loopholes in regard to the three factors which are under the radar for the current review paper; leadership engagement, PLC and teaching quality. Table.2, below illustrates a snapshot of the models and the gaps identified.

Professional Learning Model	Outcome	Gap Identified
Guskey (2002) Path Model of Teacher Change	- Professional development (PD) changes teachers’ classroom practices which bring changes in students’ learning outcomes	- Lacks ‘how’ and ‘which type’ of PD brings the change - No association to the Environment or the context
Desimone (2009) Model of Professional Development	- Professional development (PD) increases teacher knowledge and skills, attitudes and beliefs which in turn changes their instruction styles and improve student learning	- How the features lead to professional learning is unexplained
Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) Interconnected Model of Teacher Professional Growth	- Displays association with external domain impacts teacher practice	- Lacks specificity of connection of the domains to each other
Opfer and Pedder (2011) Complexity Perspective	- Displays association of the teacher with the school and the learning activity system in schools	- Impact on student learning not clear - Lacks specificity of connection of the domains to each other
Evans (2014) Model of Professional Development	- Advocates the behavioral, attitudinal and intellectual development of teacher affects their practices	- No association to the Environment or the context - Impact on student learning not clear - Lacked focus on practical application

Source: Boylan et al., 2018

The model by Guskey (2002), and Desimone (2009) are linear models which portrayed a chain of relation from professional learning of teachers to the learning outcomes of students. Guskey’s model argued that professional development of teachers transforms their teaching practices but failed to identify ‘how’ and ‘what kind of PD’ would lead to the positive effect (Boylan et al., 2018). It missed out the association of teachers with the environmental components and their influence on the learning processes. This makes it unclear to understand how to reach to the favorable result through this model. On the other hand, Desimone did list out the core features required in a successful professional development program; content focus, active learning, coherence, duration and collective participation (Boylan et al., 2018). Yet, it seemed vague without clear explanation of how the features can foster the professional learning of teachers.

Similar to Desimone, Clarke & Hollingsworth (2002), and Opfer & Pedders (2011), too, displayed the association of teachers to their environment (Boylan et al., 2018). Clarke

and Hollingsworth (2002), presented four main domains; external domain, professional experimentation, salient outcomes, and knowledge, beliefs and attitudes, which showed interconnected relation with regard to the professional development of teachers (Boylan et al., 2018). Opfer & Pedders (2011), presented three nested sub-systems; learning activity system, teachers, and school system which claimed an interconnection between the orientation, learning and the nested sub-systems (Boylan et al., 2018). However, the two models appeared under-researched with no specific connection of domains and sub-systems explained. This would make the practical application of the models difficult and ineffective. Another drawback in Opfer and Pedder’s models was that the learning outcome of the students was not focused. So, whether the professional learning of teachers bring any visible change on the teaching quality or student performance is not clear (Boylan et al., 2018).

The model by Evan (2014), highlighted three main professional development components; behavioral development, attitudinal development and intellectual

development which are believed to bring a change with the learning (Boylan et al., 2018). However, this seemed more of a theoretical aspect which lacked practical implication of teacher learning. This model too, lacked attention on the impact on the students' achievement. Besides, Evan treated teachers as independent components separate from their environment. Hence, the association with the external environment with the learning processes was neglected (Boylan et al., 2018).

Though, the five models had important components related to the enhancement of the professional learning of teachers, they needed further exploration to understand how Professional learning can support the attempts of leadership in fostering the teaching practices of teachers and raising the quality of teaching (Boylan et al., 2018).

A Review of PLC Characteristics

PLC has been identified as a multidimensional concept and researchers had put forward several dimension (Olsson, 2019). The reason for the varying dimensions is related to the context-sensitive nature of PLC (Derk, 2019). This means characters of PLC depends on the context at which it is studied. Vanblaere and Devos (2018), justified this and stated that the tradition, culture and conditions in different schools and countries differ and it would influence the way people learn and grow.

The concept is gradually maturing with new dimensions proposed with each new research (Papadakou, 2018). Amongst the most commonly followed model of PLC was by Dufour et al., (2008) which presented six components; shared purpose and vision, collaboration, effective strategies, action research, constant improvement and focus on end result (Boylan et al., 2018). Another theoretical development was brought in this field by Mahimuang (2018), with five elements; shared values, collective responsibility, shared learning, shared leadership and caring relationship. Three new dimensions came into light with this model; collective responsibility, shared leadership and caring relationship. This model has given high weightage on caring relationship where he believed this component influences on other components' efficiency (Mahimuang, 2018). Olsson (2019), also put forward similar characteristics such as collaborative and reflective inquiry, shared vision, and collective responsibility. A recent advancement to the theory was offered by Kools et al. (2020), with several characteristics; shared vision, continuous learning, collaboration, inquiry learning, exchanging knowledge and learning, innovation & exploration, and learning from and with the external environment. The common understanding in these models is that it enhances the development of teachers by shifting the radar from teacher attrition and isolation to teacher collaboration and collective learning (Brand, 2020; Admiraal et al., 2019; Tsalidi, 2019; Kools et al., 2020).

The literature review revealed that the concept of PLC was more famous in western countries compared to that in Asian region (Ibrahim et al., 2020; Ismail et al., 2020; Chua et al., 2020). This was evident from the published articles selected for the review, where there as scarcity of published articles in Asian region, specifically in Maldives. The Figure.2

below, represents an empirical evidence on the study focus regions of these articles.

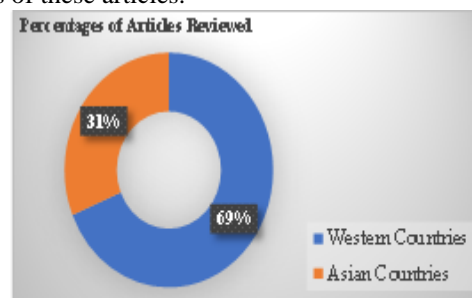


Figure.2: The chart representing the percentage of articles reviewed from different regions

Source: Developed from the Literature Review

This may be a limitation of the review to propose a framework to Maldivian Education Sector from a review based mainly on western models. However, this could be a base for further studies in Maldivian context, as this is a new concept in Maldives.

A Review of PLC Practices

Professional learning communities remain as one of the most popular ideas in the field of profession development (Ibrahim et al., 2020). Most of the theories and models under PLC are focused on explaining the importance of creating learning communities who share the responsibility of learning and collectively gain knowledge and uplift each other (Ismail et al., 2020). Kools & Bouckaert (2018), explained that traditional professional development programs failed to develop the teaching skills due to the irrelevant content, passive and tedious delivering strategies and lack of continuous support. PLCs advocated to address these practical gaps and proposed several models which offers opportunities for continuous technical support for teachers (Kools & Bouckaert, 2018; Derk, 2019; Brand, 2020).

Yet, building an effective professional learning community may not be an overnight process but requires careful planning and consistent implementation to get the maximum benefit (Vanblaere and Devos, 2018). Professional learning communities can convert the schools into learning organisations where everyone contribute to the learning and development of each other. According to Papadakou (2018), teachers learning happens at three main levels; at classroom level, school level and community level. Papadakou (2018) describes learning organizations as one where knowledge is created, acquired, transferred and people modify their behavior to adapt to the new knowledge. Learning is understood as a social activity and the schools can be platform for learning to happen. Therefore the classrooms, the schools as a whole and the community which is involved, need to be equipped and designed to promote knowledge enrichment and skill development. All the members in the school should be directed towards a same goal with a clear and meaningful vision and mission, the policies and strategies should be supportive for engagement of teachers in active learning. Collaboration of teachers should be embedded in the school culture that it ingrates well with the routine work of school. Another common practice followed in schools with regard to PLC, is practice-

based learning (Admiraal et al., 2019). This concept allows teachers to collaborate within the context of classrooms (Admiraal et al., 2019). Teachers in some schools were said to coherently connect class practices with other teachers in a way that they all support each other's work (Tsalidi, 2019). They engage in reflective dialogues and share boundary artifacts such as student works, lesson plans or student assessment work (Russell, 2018). Recording lessons and sharing them as videos, discussing classroom issues and concerns as case studies are also among practices followed in western countries adopting the concept of PLC (Olsson, 2019). They also agree on same values and norm and follow them together as a team so that students observe a consistency in teacher behaviors (Admiraal et al., 2019). Group learning is also a practice observed in some schools (Tsalidi, 2019). Teachers were categorized into different groups such as department teachers, grade teachers or class teachers, who share similar curriculum, syllabus or responsibilities which makes them homogeneous as groups (Admiraal et al., 2019). The Principals found grouping was easy to facilitate as well as monitor the behavior and progress (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). These teachers participate in formal or informal learning and learn together (Vanblaere and Devos, 2018). Peer observation, demonstrating model lessons, reviewing document work, mentoring, coaching, constructive feedback, are amongst the activities carried out by such groups (Tsalidi, 2019). The team learning would help teachers to understand challenges and solutions in the teaching and learning processes. For example; The effective use of code-mixing, code-switching, and language translation used to deal with the challenges in teaching English as a second language and Arabic language could be discussed and familiarized in small learning groups (Al Aqad, 2018; Al Aqad, 2017; Al Aqad et al., 2017; Azar and Tanggaraju, 2020; Hashim et al., 2016). Olsson (2019), also argued that context in every school is unique and original and thus the policies and strategies be fitting to the school context. Though the practitioners strongly believe these activities bring positive changes in teachers' attitudes and behavior, they claim that such programs can be sustained when it is well embedded into the school culture (Admiraal et al., 2019).

A Review of Leadership Engagements

The models and theories on PLCs not only provided propositions for the growth and development of teachers and teaching practices, but it also studied the factors affecting the successful implementation of PLCs in schools (Godlesky & Elizabeth, 2018). Among the many significant factors, leadership engagement is one factor agreed to be highly influential on the effectiveness of PLCs (Azra and Adnan, 2020). According to Tsalidi (2019), the leaders in a school (the principals, administrators, teacher leaders) make policies and practices for PLCs, and communicate them with staff, train, mentor and coach the teachers, provide the necessary conditions and create an appropriate culture for learning and developments. Hence, the school leadership is believed to raise the quality of teaching and improve the performance of students (Azra and Adnan, 2020).

Teacher leadership was identified to be the most influential leadership amongst school leadership. Vanblaere and Devos

(2018), also believed that when teachers assume a lead role in school, they become more responsible in their own learning and development. Olsson (2019), appealed the principals and administrators to develop the teacher leadership. According to him a development-oriented leadership with a top-down support should be provided in order to drive a bottom-up change. This clearly means principals need to motivate, facilitate, guide and empower teachers for the change that Principals expect to see from teachers. Teachers found open dialogue, sharing leadership, sharing responsibility with the senior leaders to build collegial relationship, based on faith and solidarity. When teachers take the lead role, they become teacher of teachers, researchers, brokers, gatekeepers, mentors and curriculum developers, which are all different ways to improve the teaching quality (Kools & Bouckaert, 2018). Hence, literature depicts the influence on leadership engagements on the effectiveness of PLCs which in turn shows a positive link to the quality of teaching.

A Review of Quality of Teaching

According to World Bank (2019), the main concern around the education today is not the equal access for education but equal access for quality education. UNICEF (2018), agrees on this issue and argues that the quality of teachers need to be improved in order to improve the standard of teaching and learning. According to Ibrahim et al. (2020), collaboration should not be an option but a necessity to keep up with the fast pacing and uncertain World. Teachers need to be continuously upgraded, technically and professionally, so that they can keep up to date with the fast-changing world (Antinluoma et al., 2018). Their teaching skills and learning skills, both need to be polished in order to see effective changes in their practices (Papadakou, 2018).

Teacher-led collaboration is believed to bring lots of positive changes in the behaviors and attitudes (Derk, 2019). Teacher empowerment and leadership is argued to raise their self-efficacy and feel the belongingness in school (Ismail et al., 2020). Hence, they become highly committed and lead to ambitious teaching and learning (Chua et al., 2020). Such practices are bound to raise the standards of education (Azra and Adnan, 2020). This was evident in the case presented by Brand (2020), where he explained how a school which positioned teachers as leaders and allowed inquiry-based learning and teaching resulted in outstanding performances by students. Another study where the teacher interaction was scarce, role of other leaders were limited, sharing of knowledge and ideas were restricted to friends, only occasional model classes observed, and development sessions were conducted twice a year without any follow-up, displayed an unsuccessful PLC with no contribution to teaching and learning (Chua et al., 2020). The two cases were in consensus with the fact that leadership and collaborative work improves the quality of teaching. Literature revealed that PLC creates a learning organization in schools where the team performances can transform the instructional strategies, increase the job involvement of teachers, increase job satisfaction and thereby leads to student motivation and effective learning in classrooms (Chua et al., 2020; Derk, 2019; Ismail et al., 2020; Brand, 2020).

Literature has offered numerous models and theories representing the influence of PLC on quality of teaching, and the impact of leadership on the effectiveness of PLCs (Chua et al., 2020; Derk, 2019; Ismail et al., 2020; Brand, 2020; Vanblaere and Devos, 2018; Papadakou, 2018). Yet, it does not concentrate on the association of the three factors together to get a comprehensive understanding for a practically applicable solution in schools. The separate models also do not focus on the mediating effect of PLCs on leadership engagements and teaching practices (Chua et al., 2020; Derk, 2019; Ismail et al., 2020; Brand, 2020; Vanblaere and Devos, 2018; Papadakou, 2018). This study therefore, seek to provide an integrated framework in enhancing the teaching practices, in the context of Maldives. The framework would assist the schools and education sector in planning and executing meaningful teacher development programs by considering the three factors together.



Figure.3: The Framework Showing the mediating Effect of PLC on Leadership Engagement and Quality of Teaching
Source: Developed from Literature

Conclusion

The study discussed the mediating effect of professional learning communities on leadership engagements and quality of teaching in the schools in Maldives. The literature revealed a number of models and theories to agree on the impact of the three factors; leadership engagement, professional learning communities and quality of teaching on each other. Hence, this study provided an integrated framework, in the light of literature, to link the three factors as to illuminate the mediating effect of PLC on leadership engagement and quality of teaching.

This framework would offer a more detailed understanding on how the quality of teaching can be improved. This information would aid the school leaders and policy makers to transform the traditional professional development programs into more effective professional learning communities so as to raise the stand of teaching and learning in schools. The concept would help the school leaders to create a more positive and a team learning culture in schools. Besides, the framework would assist the school leaders to understand their role in the execution of PLCs as well as in refining teaching in learning in schools. This paper is a conceptual paper which may be further investigated to collect empirical evidence from the schools in Maldives.

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