

Research Article

## Teachers' Preferences in Utilising Professional Learning Community Tools for English Language Teaching Collaboration

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Article History</p> <p>Received Oct 22, 2024</p> <p>Revised Dec 21, 2024</p> <p>Accepted Dec 26, 2024</p>	<p>This study investigates the preferences, challenges, and recommendations for improving the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) among English language teachers in Malaysia. Through qualitative email interviews with 30 teachers, this study robustly examines the utilisation of various collaborative tools within the Ministry of Education's KIT PLC in educational settings, enabling a comprehensive exploration of diverse teaching experiences and preferences. The findings suggest that 'Teacher Sharing Sessions', 'Peer Coaching', and 'Learning Walks' are the most favored tools for promoting collaboration among teachers. The study identifies significant challenges to effective PLC implementation, including time constraints, technology-related resource limitations, and resistance to new teaching methods. Recommendations for overcoming these challenges include integrating PLC activities into official schedules, enhancing resource allocation, and fostering a culture of collaboration and communication among educators. This research contributes to the field by outlining actionable strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of PLCs, aiming to improve teacher professional development and, ultimately, student learning outcomes. This study not only underscores the importance of collaborative professional environments in education but also provides a foundation for further research into optimising PLC frameworks to meet the evolving needs of teachers and students.</p>
<p><b>Keywords</b></p> <p>Professional development</p> <p>Professional learning community</p> <p>Collaborative tools</p> <p>English language teachers</p>	



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### 1. Introduction

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are integral to teachers' professional development. They are teacher-led groups, and as Vescio et al. (2007) describe, they are a growing trend that gained significant momentum in the professional development of teachers. Similarly, they are built upon a shared belief that collaborative work among teachers can cultivate a more effective and fulfilling learning environment for everyone (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). These communities facilitate collaborative learning by allowing members to share challenges and solutions in a social context in order to enhance the overall learning experience for everyone involved.

A professional learning community (PLC) signifies a shift from isolated teaching methods to a collaborative, results-driven approach where teachers work together to enhance student learning. The practices have positively impacted teacher efficacy, instructional practices, and student outcomes (Jones & Dexter, 2014; Nguyen et al., 2023). This involves a commitment to continuous improvement, using data to inform practices and implement timely interventions for struggling students. PLCs emphasise a culture of collaboration, with teachers forming teams to analyse and improve classroom practices. The core principle lies in shifting the focus from teaching to ensuring all students learn, requiring a deep understanding of effective practices and their implementation (DuFour, 2004). Garet et al. (2001) also emphasise that teachers who participate in PLCs are better equipped to meet the diverse learning needs of their students. In other words, at the heart of a PLC's mission is enhancing teaching practices and improving student learning.

Regarding the significance of PLCs in the Malaysian context, the Ministry of Education, Malaysia (MoE) has actively promoted the integration of PLCs in schools as a strategic approach to developing teacher expertise and enhancing student learning. The KIT PLC framework equips teachers with collaborative tools to support professional development nationwide through structured, evidence-based learning communities. While the implementation of PLC is designed to enhance collaboration among teachers, there are several obstacles that can hinder its effectiveness. Primary among these are integration and compatibility difficulties, where new tools may not align seamlessly with existing infrastructure, creating technical barriers and collaborative impediments (Ali et al., 2011; Kloser et al., 2020). Additionally, the training, if insufficient, may result in discrepancies in usability among teachers. This often leads to frustration and diminished motivation to engage with the tools (Kloser et al., 2020). Moreover, teacher engagement is frequently undermined by factors such as time constraints and the perceived irrelevance of the tools to their daily needs (Razak et al., 2019; Tahir & Musah, 2020).

Despite the launch of the KIT PLC by the MoE, there remains a significant lack of empirical evidence. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of how these tools are utilised and perceived within the context of Malaysian schools, thereby offering new insights into their practical impacts and challenges. By addressing this overlooked aspect, the research promises to deliver actionable recommendations that could transform teaching practices and professional development frameworks. It is essential to comprehend the degree to which these tools are incorporated into everyday teaching practices and their impact on educational outcomes.

This study explores the preferences of English language teachers for the 13 collaborative tools outlined in the KIT PLC provided by the MoE and the challenges encountered during the implementation of the PLCs, as well as the recommendations to improve the practice of PLCs. Accordingly, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Which PLC collaborative tools do teachers prefer?
2. What challenges do teachers encounter when implementing PLC collaborative tools?
3. What are the recommendations to improve the practice of the PLC?

The findings from this research will offer actionable insights for teachers and policymakers, particularly in enhancing the implementation of PLC tools within English language education. Recommendations generated from the study will also support the MoE in refining these tools to better meet the needs of teachers and students alike, thereby improving the overall quality of education.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Collaborative Tools for Reflection**

Etienne Wenger's conceptual framework of Communities of Practice (CoP) provides a robust theoretical underpinning for understanding how learning occurs within a social context, particularly among professionals who share common goals and practices (Wenger et al., 2010). According to Wenger, a CoP involves groups of people who engage in collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour (Wenger, 2009). This theory is particularly pertinent to PLCs' functioning, which are essentially specialised forms of CoPs tailored towards teachers. While Wenger's framework offers valuable insights into collaborative learning dynamics, its application in the context of English language teaching in Malaysia faces distinct challenges.

Among English language teachers, PLCs serve as dynamic CoPs where members collaboratively engage in activities that enhance teaching efficacy and student learning outcomes (Roy & Hord, 2006). These communities are characterised by structured activities such as Lesson Study, Peer Coaching, and Teacher Sharing Sessions, which are integral to fostering mutual engagement, shared repertoire, and a joint enterprise. They are critical elements identified by Wenger as essential to the functioning of CoPs.

Teacher Sharing Sessions offer a platform for teachers to disseminate their insights and innovations and to discuss challenges and successes in a supportive environment (Coffey, 2010; Shagrir, 2017). They

have been identified as a valuable platform for disseminating insights, innovations, and addressing challenges within a supportive environment (Little, 1990). However, within the context of English language teaching in Malaysia, specific challenges and preferences have emerged that warrant further exploration. While these sessions encourage collaborative learning and knowledge sharing, they may indicate underlying issues with tool accessibility, relevance, or support structures. By explicitly examining the intersection of Teacher Sharing Sessions and challenges faced by English language teachers in Malaysia, this study aims to bridge the research gap and identify the aspects of these sessions that are most beneficial, as well as those that require adaptation to meet the specific demands of English language teaching in the Malaysian context.

Peer Coaching, another critical element within PLCs, involves teachers working in pairs or small groups to observe each other's classroom practice, provide feedback, and discuss ways to improve teaching and learning (Nguyen et al., 2023; Roy & Hord, 2006). This tool leverages the power of direct peer-to-peer interaction and feedback, fostering an environment of trust and mutual support crucial for community professional growth and identity development.

By engaging in these structured activities, teachers in PLCs not only share and develop their professional knowledge but also negotiate meanings and redefine practice considering collective experiences and outcomes. This aligns with Wenger's notion that identity in professional practice is formed in part by participation and reification, the process by which a group constructs an understanding of concepts through activities and discussions. CoP framework significantly illuminates the operational dynamics of PLCs (Wenger, 2009). It underscores the importance of social participation and its integral role in teachers' professional development. By framing PLCs within this theoretical context, a better understanding of how English language teachers navigate and negotiate their professional identities and practices as part of a larger educational community emerges. This process ultimately leads to improved educational practices and enhanced learner outcomes.

## 2.2. Social Constructivism

Social constructivism, a theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky, posits that learning is a social process where knowledge is co-constructed through individual interactions (Palincsar, 1998). This theoretical framework is particularly relevant to the concept of PLCs, where collaborative engagement is central to teachers' professional development and ongoing learning (Chalmers & Keown, 2006; Ng & Tan, 2009).

Vygotsky's theory emphasises the importance of social interaction in cognitive development and suggests that community and culture profoundly influence learning. This concept aligns with the foundational principles of PLCs (Fani & Ghaemi, 2011).

In the context of PLCs, tools such as Teacher Sharing Sessions and Peer Coaching are practical manifestations of Vygotsky's theory. Teachers share knowledge and experiences during Teacher Sharing Sessions, discuss challenges, and disseminate successful strategies (Hassan & Din, 2015; Nguyen et al., 2023). These sessions provide a platform for teachers to reflect on their practice in the light of their peers' insights, fostering a dynamic environment where instructional strategies are not only shared but also critically evaluated and refined. This process of sharing and reflection is crucial for the continuous professional growth of teachers and directly supports Vygotsky's assertion that learning is enhanced through social interactions (Jones et al., 1998).

Similarly, Peer Coaching offers a structured yet collegial approach where teachers observe each other's teaching sessions, provide constructive feedback, and collaboratively explore new teaching methods or improvements (Jones et al., 1998). This peer-to-peer exchange not only helps to consolidate individual teachers' practice in the reflective process but also builds a supportive network that encourages experimentation and risk-taking in pedagogical approaches.

Furthermore, Vygotsky introduced the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which defines what a learner can do with and without help (Jones et al., 1998). PLCs enable experienced teachers to guide the professional development of their less experienced peers, effectively expanding their ZPD. As teachers engage within their ZPD, they are more likely to advance their skills and understanding beyond their current capabilities, facilitated by the collaborative support of their peers.

Integrating social constructivist principles into PLCs also underscores the importance of cultural and contextual factors in shaping educational practices. By embedding these principles, PLCs enhance individual teacher competencies and contribute to developing a school culture that values continuous learning and mutual support.

Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, which underscores the pivotal role of social interaction in the learning process, provides a robust theoretical foundation for practices that involve collective inquiry and collaborative learning within PLCs. This approach encourages teachers to move beyond individualistic methods of professional development and embrace a more communal, interaction-based process of learning

and development, which is essential for effective educational change. Recent studies in the Malaysian context, such as those that build upon these classical theories, highlight the unique challenges and successes of implementing such collaborative frameworks in Malaysian schools (Bush et al., 2021; Ishak et al., 2020).

Social constructivists emphasise the role of social interactions in cognitive development, and Vygotsky believed that cognitive development requires the involvement of others, as learning takes place through social interactions.

### **2.3. The Ministry of Education's KIT PLC**

The PLC model in Malaysia, primarily through the MoE's KIT PLC (2019) initiative, represents a systematic approach to promoting collaborative educational practices among teachers. The KIT is not an acronym; rather, it refers to a set of structured guidelines developed by the MoE to support effective practices within PLCs. These guidelines outline specific strategies and tools that teachers can use to enhance collaboration, ensuring that the KIT serves as a comprehensive framework for improving teaching effectiveness and educational outcomes. This framework incorporates 13 distinct collaborative tools, each fulfilling unique pedagogical purposes. The focus of the KIT for PLCs on these tools highlights a nationwide commitment to continuous professional development and pedagogical excellence in teaching English and other subjects.

Performance Dialogue is a structured forum for teachers to discuss performance that is based on data, identifying problems and actionable solutions. This tool and Data Analysis form a foundation for data-driven decision-making within educational settings, enabling teachers to adapt teaching strategies based on empirical evidence.

The Book Club and Teacher Study Group play a vital role in cultivating a passion for reading and facilitating ongoing professional development among educators. These initiatives not only enhance teachers' skills but also foster a collaborative environment that encourages lifelong learning. These groups encourage the sharing of knowledge and ideas which supports the professional growth of teachers beyond the traditional training sessions.

Video Critique and Learning Walks offer teachers practical insights through peer observation and feedback. These tools are designed to enhance teachers' reflective practice by allowing them to observe, critique, and learn from actual teaching sessions, thereby fostering a culture of constructive feedback.

Peer Coaching and Lesson Study facilitate direct collaboration between teachers to plan, observe, and

refine teaching practices. These activities are structured to enhance teachers' instructional skills through continuous peer interaction and feedback.

Teacher Sharing Sessions, Critical Friends Group, and New Teacher Induction and Mentoring provide forums for knowledge exchange and support among teachers at different stages of their careers. These tools are essential for fostering a collaborative teaching community that promotes shared learning and mentorship. Problem Solving Groups address specific classroom challenges, allowing teachers to collaboratively develop solutions that enhance student achievement and classroom management.

Finally, the Horizontal and Vertical Teams are innovative structures that allow teachers to work across different grades and subjects to create cohesive and comprehensive educational experiences for students. These teams ensure continuous learning and alignment across different educational levels.

Integrating these PLC tools into Malaysian education illustrates a robust approach to enhancing teachers' competencies. Through the KIT PLC, the MoE aims to equip teachers with the skills and tools necessary to address the dynamic challenges of modern education, thereby improving teaching practices and student outcomes across the country.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the preferred PLC collaborative tools, the challenges encountered and recommendations for improving the practice of PLCs among teachers within the Northeast District. Qualitative research is particularly suited to explore complex social phenomena like PLCs, as it allows for rich, nuanced data collection and analysis of participant perspectives. This approach is foundational in educational research, enabling a deeper exploration of how educational practices and interactions influence teacher behaviour and professional development (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

#### **3.2. Participants**

The study under examination focused on a purposively selected sample of 30 teachers from various schools across the Northeast District. This larger sample size was chosen to ensure comprehensive coverage of the diverse teaching environments within the district. The purposive sampling technique allowed the researchers to assemble a participant pool that was well-versed in PLCs and representative of a wide range of experiences and contexts, as recommended by Berndt (2020).

The diversity among participants was carefully considered to enhance the richness of the data. The sample included teachers from one district, spanning primary and secondary education levels, to provide a broad perspective on PLC practices across different educational settings. Participants also ranged from novice teachers to those with over twenty years of experience, allowing the researchers to explore how PLC engagement varies with professional maturity. Palinkas et al. (2014) noted that this method ensures a representative reflection of the phenomenon under investigation.

### 3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection in this study was conducted via email interviews using structured interview questions (Hamilton & Bowers, 2006; Murray & Sixsmith, 1998). Structured interviews involve a fixed set of questions asked in the same order for every participant. This uniformity ensures that all interviewees are provided with the same context and cues. The structured nature of the interview questions ensured consistency across responses while allowing for depth and nuance, aligning with the qualitative research goal of comprehensively exploring the richness of human experiences.

Email interviews, an asynchronous form of online communication, were selected for this study due to their capacity to offer participants enhanced flexibility and ample time to reflect deeply on their experiences (James, 2015). This method was particularly advantageous for the study, which sought to gather nuanced insights into teachers' perceptions regarding PLC tools. Reflecting before responding is crucial in qualitative research, where understanding complex thoughts and experiences is key. Furthermore, potential limitations were recognised, such as reduced spontaneity and challenges in probing for clarifications. To mitigate these, a rigorous follow-up protocol was employed where additional, targeted questions were sent to clarify ambiguous responses or to delve deeper into specific topics, thus enhancing the richness and depth of the data collected. This approach not only addressed the spontaneity concern but also ensured a comprehensive exploration of the themes relevant to the study's objectives.

The qualitative data collected from email interviews were analysed using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis, a method widely recognised for its effectiveness in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2016). This structured process began with a thorough familiarisation with the data, where all responses were read multiple times to gain a deep understanding of the content, allowing for the identification of initial patterns and insights that emerged directly from the participants' contributions. The data were systematically coded after this initial review, organising the content into meaningful groups aligned



with the research questions. As the analysis progressed, these initial codes were collated into potential themes, each representing a central idea within the gathered data. These themes were then meticulously reviewed and refined to accurately reflect the coded segments and the dataset. This critical review process involved defining and naming each theme to encapsulate the core concepts they represented, thus providing a clear and structured insight into the patterns within the data (Zheng et al., 2021). The final step involved producing a comprehensive report synthesising the thematic findings with the study's objectives. This report detailed how the identified themes contributed to a deeper understanding of teachers' perspectives on PLC tools, highlighting challenges and suggestions for improvement. The rigorous application of these thematic analysis steps facilitated a nuanced exploration of the teachers' experiences, providing valuable insights into the use of PLC collaborative tools (Kloser et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2021).

## 4. Findings and Discussions

### 4.1. Dissemination Patterns Based on PLC Collaborative Tool Preferences

This section of the research examines the preferences of teachers for Professional Learning Community (PLC) tools revealing how these preferences are distributed and what they suggest about collaborative and individual practices in educational settings.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Preferred PLC Collaborative Tools Among Teachers

PLC Tool	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher Sharing Session	15	50%
Peer Coaching	5	16.7%
Learning Walk	3	10%
Lesson Study	3	10%
Data Analysis	2	6.7%
Performance Dialogue	1	3.3%
Critical Friends Group	1	3.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 meticulously categorises the preferred PLC collaborative tools, delineating a clear trend in tool preference. It reveals a significant inclination towards Teacher Sharing Sessions, which are chosen by half of the participants (50%). This preference underscores the high value placed on collaborative exchanges and the sharing of diverse teaching methodologies, enhancing both knowledge and teaching efficacy.

Peer Coaching, Learning Walks and Lesson Study also hold substantial preference, reflecting the supportive and observational nature of these tools that facilitate direct improvements in teaching practices.

Peer Coaching, with 16.7% of the total preference, highlights the importance of mutual feedback and mentoring among teachers. In the collected data, both Learning Walks and Lesson Study show similar engagement levels, each receiving 10% of the total responses. This parity suggests that teachers find comparable value in these practices as tools. The equal distribution of responses may indicate that both tools are equally utilised in the educational setting.

Data Analysis, Performance Dialogue, and Critical Friends Group represent smaller segments of the total preferences, indicating more specialised or less universally adopted tools. Specifically, Data Analysis, Performance Dialogue, and Critical Friends Group preferred by 6.7%, 3.3% and 3.3%, respectively, indicate a leaning towards data-driven decision-making and structured and constructive peer feedback.

Based on the findings, they are categorised into four levels based on their frequency of mention: Highly Valued Collaborative Tools, Moderately Utilised Tools, Less Frequently Chosen Tools, and Tools Lacking Engagement. This classification illustrated the relative importance and utility of these tools as perceived by participants, providing insight into past trends in professional development practices.

#### **4.1.1. Highly Valued Collaborative Tools**

The analysis of collaborative tools among teachers revealed a strong preference for Teacher Sharing Sessions, which 15 out of 30 participants recognised as highly effective in facilitating the exchange of diverse teaching methods and experiences. These sessions emerged as the most favoured tool, as teachers appreciated the direct applicability of the strategies discussed. One participant, P17, noted, "Teacher Sharing Session allows us to exchange a variety of teaching methods and ideas, which are directly applicable in our classrooms." Similarly, P30 expressed gratitude for the exposure to effective practices from peers, stating, "I can learn from different but effective approaches other teachers have, which is really helpful." Teacher Sharing Sessions allow teachers to engage in collective learning, share innovative ideas, and make joint pedagogical decisions. Postholm's findings indicate that this type of collaborative learning can help teachers enhance their professional development (Sandar & Kálmán, 2022). Kuusisaari's study further revealed that innovative ideas often emerge through these teacher discussions and collaborations (Sandar & Kálmán, 2022). Moreover, teacher collaboration has been shown to influence student learning positively. As Moolenaar highlighted, teachers' relationships and networks are critical factors for student achievement and educational change (Sandar & Kálmán, 2022). This research suggests that Teacher Sharing Sessions,

as a form of teacher collaboration, can be an effective tool for professional learning communities to improve teaching and learning (Tallman, 2020). Overall, Teacher Sharing Sessions serves as dynamic examples of collective knowledge construction and sharing, aligning with Etienne Wenger's CoPs model (Wenger, 1998).

#### 4.1.2. Moderately Utilised Tools

Peer Coaching, Learning Walks and Lesson Study were categorised under the moderately utilised tools for teacher collaboration. Peer Coaching gained recognition, with participants highlighting its importance in providing mutual support and sharing practical teaching strategies. Participants valued peer coaching for creating a nurturing network where they could give and receive feedback effectively. P12 remarked, "Peer Coaching has created a supportive environment where I can get and give feedback effectively." P23 expressed a similar sentiment, noting, "Through Peer Coaching, we offer each other assistance and learn from our shared experiences." Peer Coaching, for its role in providing mutual support and sharing practical teaching strategies, embodying the joint enterprise and mutual engagement essential to CoPs (Nguyen et al., 2023; Roy & Hord, 2006).

Learning Walks and Lesson Study, other significant tools, were chosen by three participants, respectively. Learning Walks offered direct observational insights into classroom practices, underscoring its importance in practical learning. Learning Walks were praised for providing clarity and insight through direct observational learning. P16 valued this tool for its immediacy and effectiveness: "Learning walks let me see clearly and directly how effective practices are implemented in real time." Additionally, P28 found these observations immediately beneficial, explaining, "Observing my peers during a Learning Walk provides immediate ideas I can use myself." This highlights the effectiveness of practical learning, central to Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism, which emphasizes the importance of social interactions and practical applications in enhancing learning (Jones et al., 1998).

The implementation of lesson study is widely recognised as a practical approach to professional development, emphasising the collaborative dynamics inherent in the process (Leigh et al., 2008). As indicated by the responses from participants P5 and P29, lesson study sessions serve as a crucial platform for teachers to openly discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their lessons, fostering a culture of continuous improvement (Weiss & Weiss, 2001). P5 noted, "These sessions serve as a platform for us, teachers, to openly discuss the strengths and weaknesses of our lesson, fostering a culture of continuous improvement."

Similarly, P29 reflected on the initial challenges and subsequent realisations: "It was difficult at first as we thought it was meant to find our mistakes. But then we understand that more ideas can be contributed when we work together to plan the lesson based on our reflections."

The collaborative planning process is a key benefit of lesson study. This process involves synthesising insights from discussions about lessons to enhance future instructional strategies. By planning together, teachers can align their educational goals, share successful strategies, and ensure consistency in teaching methods across different classes. Furthermore, regular lesson study sessions help build a supportive network among teachers, facilitating the exchange of ideas and promoting a collaborative work culture. One participant, P27, remarked on the value of collaboration in Lesson Study sessions, stating, "Working together in Lesson Study sessions, we tackle classroom issues collectively, which enhances our strategies."

The insights from the participants underscore the effectiveness of lesson study sessions in promoting reflective teaching practices and collaborative lesson planning. These sessions not only enhance individual teaching competencies but also contribute to the collective efficacy of the educational team (Leigh et al., 2008; Rahayu et al., 2020). According to Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018), the most successful and sustainable forms of collaboration are characterised by both expert knowledge and strong collegial relationships, creating a sense of "collaborative professionalism".

#### **4.1.3. Less Frequently Chosen Tools**

Performance Dialogue, Data Analysis and Critical Friends Group were less frequently chosen tools, with each receiving attention from one, two, and two participants, respectively. Performance Dialogue and Data Analysis tools were recognised for promoting data-driven decision-making and strategic planning in instruction. Participants emphasised how these methodologies refined their teaching practices. One participant, referred to as P11, noted, "Data Analysis allows us to make informed decisions that directly impact our teaching effectiveness," while another, P19, highlighted the benefits of Performance Dialogue in adapting methods based on actual data, stating, "Performance Dialogue helps us assess and adapt our methods based on real data." These tools are effective in refining teaching practices within the scope of social constructivism, enabling educators to apply collective insights for instructional improvement (Palincsar, 1998).

The Critical Friends Group was recognised for its contributions to professional development, as P8 shared, "The Critical Friends Group has been vital for obtaining constructive feedback that genuinely helps improve my teaching." Both provided avenues for objective feedback and constructive peer review, reflecting the CoP principles where communities engage in mutual growth through shared practices and collective

reflection (Wenger, 1998).

These tools and feedback mechanisms were acknowledged for their significant impact on the professional growth of both in-service and new teachers.

#### **4.1.4. Tools Lacking Engagement**

Several tools, such as Book Club, Teacher Study Groups, Video Critiques, New Teacher Induction and Mentoring, Problem Solving Groups, and Horizontal and Vertical Teams, did not receive any mentions. This absence indicates a potential lack of usage or lesser relevance perceived by the participants within the current professional development framework.

By understanding these influences, educational leaders can better support the implementation of these PLC tools, tailoring professional development programs to match teachers' specific needs and preferences. This tailored approach enhances teacher satisfaction and leads to more effective teaching and learning outcomes.

## **4.2. Thematic Insights on PLC Implementation Challenges**

The following five themes have been developed based on the findings regarding the challenges encountered during the implementation of PLCs and the recommendations for enhancing PLC practices.

### **4.2.1. Time Constraints and Scheduling Conflicts**

Time constraints represent a significant challenge for teachers attempting to integrate Professional Learning Community (PLC) tools into their schedules. Given teachers' already packed schedules, the difficulty in finding sufficient time for PLC activities leads to conflicts with other academic responsibilities. Some have integrated PLC tasks directly into their official timetables to address this widespread issue, while others have utilised online platforms to facilitate asynchronous discussions and sharing. For instance, one educator noted the benefit of digital solutions: "We addressed this by sharing materials online whereby teachers can take their time to go through it and informal sharing and discussion in Telegram groups" (P3). Participants have suggested scheduling PLC sessions within the existing work timetable to manage time more effectively, as expressed by another participant: "Fix the PLC session in our work timetable" (P12). Other than that, P4 highlighted, "One common challenge is time management, as teachers already have packed schedules. While this P2 mentioned, "Time restraining. Busy with other tasks. Need better planning", there were suggestions for "Time constrain – choose free time to sit together and discuss professionally" (P12) and "time constraint. doing it online" (P10)

The challenge of time constraints and scheduling conflicts in implementing PLC activities is well-documented in the literature. Hord (1997) emphasises that effective scheduling and dedicated time allocation are crucial for fostering meaningful professional development within schools. Her work suggests that without structured time management, educators struggle to balance these activities with their existing responsibilities.

#### **4.2.2. Resource Limitations**

A notable barrier to the effective implementation of PLC tools is the lack of necessary technological and educational resources. The lack of essential materials like projectors and collaborative software hinders the effective use of PLC strategies. In response, they have had to adapt using manual methods or simplifying their approaches. One participant highlighted the scarcity of tools: "Insufficient amount of projector and other technology tools" (P12). To overcome these resource limitations, the participants recommended increased budget allocations for schools and providing essential equipment to facilitate access to PLC resources without personal financial burden, emphasising the need for "more allocation for the school to buy technology tools" (P17).

Regarding resource limitations, DuFour (2004) highlights that insufficient technological and educational resources significantly impede the functionality and success of PLCs. He argues that for PLCs to be effective, schools must prioritise budgeting for essential resources that support a collaborative learning environment. This perspective is crucial as it aligns with the concerns expressed by participants about the lack of necessary tools, which complicates the full utilisation of PLC strategies.

#### **4.2.3. Resistance to New Methods**

Resistance to new methodologies introduced through PLC initiatives frequently emerges from discomfort with unfamiliar teaching strategies. This resistance can hinder the adoption of innovative practices. Continuous professional development and a supportive teaching environment are crucial to mitigate this challenge. One educator shared their difficulty with new approaches: "It's hard to understand some unusual ways of teaching compared to what I am used to do" (P18). To combat resistance, participants suggest more comprehensive training and exposure to PLC practices, with one recommendation highlighting the need for "More expertise to guide" (P22).

Resistance to new methods poses a significant barrier to educational change, as noted by Fullan

(2007a, 2007b). Both studies examine the challenges educators face in adopting new teaching methods and innovations. The explorations highlight that continuous professional development and proper support are crucial for helping educators overcome this resistance. By addressing these challenges, the adoption of innovative practices is encouraged, as it can enhance teaching and learning outcomes.

#### **4.2.4. Student Engagement and Classroom Management**

Managing student engagement and behaviour throughout lessons that incorporate PLC tools presents substantial challenges. Teachers need tailored strategies to effectively address the diverse needs of students, especially those less academically inclined. One participant described their approach: "Encountering really weak students is really challenging as most teachers have a hard time dealing with them. We come out with very simple techniques to approach these students" (P9). Recommendations to enhance student engagement and classroom management include creating more engaging PLC activities that involve students directly and using innovative strategies to capture and maintain student attention.

Regarding student engagement and classroom management, Emmer and Stough (2001) discuss effective strategies for managing diverse student needs and improving classroom control. Their research highlights the need to adapt teaching methods to address different academic and behavioural challenges, showing the difficulties teachers face in engaging struggling students with innovative strategies.

#### **4.2.5. Collaboration and Communication Issues**

Effective collaboration among teachers is often compromised by a lack of teamwork and insufficient commitment, impacting the success of PLC initiatives. To enhance collaborative practices, schools have been encouraged to foster clearer communication and set explicit expectations for teamwork. A participant expressed frustration over the lack of cooperative spirit: "No teamwork" (P25). Recommendations to improve collaboration include fostering greater collaboration between schools and organising structured teamwork sessions to enhance the effectiveness of PLCs, as one participant suggested: "Encourage collaboration between schools to share best practices among teachers" (P15).

Collaboration and communication issues are critical in the context of PLCs, as discussed by Little (1990). She addresses the persistence of privacy and autonomy in professional relations among teachers, which can undermine the collaborative spirit essential for PLC success. Her findings suggest that enhancing teamwork and communication within schools is necessary to realise the full potential of PLCs and to improve educational practices.

By addressing these challenges with targeted strategies and considering participant recommendations, schools can enhance the effectiveness and integration of PLC tools, thereby improving teaching practices and educational outcomes.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has systematically explored the use of various Professional Learning Community (PLC) tools by teachers, uncovering a complex landscape of preferences and practices. It reveals that tools like Teacher Sharing Sessions and Peer Coaching are highly valued for their direct applicability and supportive nature, whereas Learning Walks and Performance Dialogue are moderately appealing due to their insights into effective teaching practices. However, tools like Book Clubs and Teacher Study Groups see limited engagement, possibly due to a misalignment with current professional needs or a lack of awareness of their benefits.

Central to this research is an examination of teachers' preferences for collaborative tools within PLCs, the challenges they face in these settings, and strategies to enhance their effectiveness. Communities of Practice and Social Constructivism provide theoretical insights into these collaborative dynamics, emphasising the importance of social interaction and shared experiences in professional growth.

The study identifies several barriers to effective PLC implementation, such as time constraints, resource limitations, and resistance to new methods. It recommends integrating PLC activities into official schedules, increasing funding for resources, providing comprehensive training on new educational approaches, and fostering a collaborative culture to improve PLC effectiveness. Key recommendations include developing tailored training programs that address both operational and pedagogical aspects of PLC tools and establishing structured feedback mechanisms to refine and adapt these tools continuously. Such measures enhance functionality, engagement, and ownership among teachers.

Moreover, the research underscores the crucial role of policy and administrative support in the successful adoption and sustained use of PLC tools, advocating for policy changes that prioritise the development of PLCs within educational frameworks.

Overall, this study enhances the dialogue on teacher professional development by providing empirical evidence on PLC tools' preferences and challenges, suggesting actionable strategies for improvement, and opening avenues for further research into underutilised tools and innovative practices.



## 6. Limitations and Future Research

One notable limitation of this study is its focus primarily on the implementation and effectiveness of PLCs from the perspective of teacher professional development, without directly examining the impact of these tools on student learning outcomes. While the study provides valuable insights into how PLCs can enhance teaching practices and collaborative efforts among educators, it does not extend these findings to measure how such improvements translate into student performance or achievement. This gap suggests an important area for future research, where subsequent studies could explore the direct correlation between teachers' effective use of PLC tools and the resultant educational outcomes for students. Such research would be invaluable in providing a more holistic understanding of the benefits of PLCs in the educational ecosystem.

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