

An Application of Professional Learning Community Approach to Enhance Language Learning among Students in Higher Education Institution

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Abstract Educators need to take action in terms of acquiring, creating and transferring their knowledge to students based on the professional learning community approach. It involves building a learning community in their classrooms. Researchers and professional organizations have cited the Professional Learning Community (PLC) process as having the potential to impact student achievement positively. As the current era of high stakes accountability has left educators struggling to improve the quality of teaching and learning, PLCs have been recommended to foster collaboration and make educator practices public. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine educator' descriptions of their PLCs to determine if the practice of the principles influenced student academic performance in language teaching. A quantitative research design was implemented to explore the extent to which educator training in PLC principles, the actual practice of PLC principles, and student achievement in language teaching were related. A survey was utilized to collect data regarding 365 educators' perceptions of the existence of three dimensions and seven sub-dimensions of PLCs within their institution. Final years of language course students' data were examined to measure student achievement in language learning, and inferential statistic by Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach was used to look for possible relationships between the variables. Statistical examination indicated PLC members who observed peers, provided feedback on instructional practices, worked with colleagues to judge student work quality, and collaboratively reviewed student work to improve instructional analysis were more likely to improve their quality of teaching. Further results indicated positive correlations between the dimensions belonging to values, vision and mission, a dimension of subject to support: relationship and structural and also dimensions of collective learning and applications. Finally, the model achieved the goodness of fit indices which is resulted in $Chisq/df= 2.185$; $GFI=.980$; $CFI=.991$; $TLI=.983$; $RMSEA=.065$

Keywords Professional Learning Communities, Student Achievement, Higher Education Institution, Teaching and Learning, Language Teaching

1. Introduction

Creating teachers' professional gaining knowledge of communities is an advantageous bottom-up way of bringing innovation into the science curriculum and expert development. The models of professional getting to know societies are primarily based on concepts of mastering that emphasize the co-construction of expertise through learners. Lectures in an expert learning neighborhood meet many times to discover their practices and the learning outcomes of their students, analyze their educating and their students' gaining knowledge of processes, draw conclusions, and make modifications to improve their educating and the gaining experience of their college students (Ruland, 2015). The thought of PLC arose in the discipline of education in the context of workplace-based research carried out in the 1980s. The instructors play the roles were non-stop striving for improvement, targeted on pupil learning, collaborated and explored their work efficiently. Such relationships range from the norms used in the educating of a greater individualistic culture, which commonly characterizes faculties as a place of work (Roslizam, Jamilah, & Yusof, 2018).

This article discusses the conceptual bases on which a professional learning community (PLC) has been set up involving a university lecturer and students itself. The objectives of this research were:

2. To identify the correlations between shared vision & mission, leadership & supportive sharing, collective & learning application toward language learning.
3. To identify the relationship between shared vision & mission, leadership & supportive sharing, collective & learning application toward language learning
4. To determine the mediating effects of leadership & supportive sharing between shared vision & mission, collective & learning application with language learning.

Hence, to answer the objective two and three of the research, there are seven hypotheses were tested as follow:
H1: There is a significant relationship between shared vision & mission with leadership & supportive sharing among the lectures through a student's perception.
H2: There is a significant relationship between collective & learning application with leadership & supportive

sharing among the lectures through a student's perception.

- H3: There is a significant relationship between shared vision & mission with achievement in enhancing language learning among the students in a higher education institution of Malaysia.
- H4: There is a significant relationship between leadership & supportive sharing with achievement in enhancing language learning among the students in a higher education institution of Malaysia.
- H5: There is a significant relationship between collective & learning application with achievement in enhancing language learning among the students in a higher education institution of Malaysia.
- H6: Leadership & supportive sharing is a mediator between shared vision & mission with achievement in enhancing language learning among the students in a higher education institution of Malaysia.
- H7: Leadership & supportive sharing is a mediator between collective & learning application with achievement in enhancing language learning among the students in a higher education institution of Malaysia.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept of PLC

Mohd Faiz, Muhamad Rozaimi, & Jamal@Nordin, (2016) explains that teachers in such a situation are no longer encouraged to 'give an account of themselves in terms of pedagogical aspects of what they do' other than that officially sanctioned through policy. Instead, policy constraints narrowly circumscribe the purposes of schooling within a climate of teaching to the test, which in turn foreclose on broader process-orientated commitments to educational and democratic transformational goals. The current curriculum reform approach leaves lecturers with little conceptual space to meaningfully engage students in life world or socially generated knowledge that will engage and stimulate students within the institutions (Tan et al., 2017). Leveraged via PLC activity, pedagogical commitments require an academic focus and approach to impact student learning that augments the narrow curriculum orientations implicit in the curriculum.

Pedagogical techniques are the one factor that can contribute the most significant to improving student achievement Ruland, (2015) as they are crucial to 'changing the practices and relations that directly shape learning'. PLC function as a collaborative, collegial space where professionals use an inquiry-based approach to address daily teaching practices as they emerge within specific school contexts. Such a collaborative inquiry allows lecturers to 'reflect on practice, examine the evidence about the relationship between practice and student outcomes, and make changes that improve teaching and learning for the particular students in their classes' (Muhammad Faizal et al., 2013).

A collaborative inquiry is one of the approaches that 'has the potential to create big conceptual change, and dramatic changes

in practice include ongoing and challenging engagement. It becomes with new ideas, rethinking existing beliefs, unlearning past habits and practices, and going through the process of learning how to do things in new ways' (Mohd Faiz & Jamal@Nordin, 2015). The PLC within this collaborative space engages participants in a conversation about their pedagogic learning and lays the foundation for possible shifts in their pedagogic habitus (Badru Hisham & Mohd. Nasaruddin, 2016). Communications within the PLC are, therefore, based on mutuality, trust and respect. The technique will create a safe space that engages lecturers as they expose their implicitly held beliefs and practices to scrutiny and debate. Due to the level of implied risk of lecturers presenting their teaching styles to critical examination, the PLC emphasizes the need to create a respectful and enabling dialogical atmosphere where honest engagement and reflection are encouraged, as well offering an opportunity for the lecturers to talk about their uncertainties and conceptual weaknesses; to admit their mistakes; and to expose their vulnerabilities (Dehdary, 2017). PLC participants will need to give a voice in generating possible imagined responses to the problems they encounter during their classroom practices (Smith, 2010).

Fundamental to the success of a PLC is a formulated and communicated focus that differentiates among the various needs and choices of the individuals involved in the group (Intanam & Wongwanich, 2014). An engaging discussion challenges lecturers to 'reconceptualize, unlearn, or make changes to existing practices and structures, legitimating the change process by making the status quo more difficult to protect' (Jones, Stall, & Yarbrough, 2013). The focus of the PLC is to be problem-based within a socially just pedagogical orientation. The participants of the PLC have been invited to identify and share educational problems that they are faced with in their classroom setting, opening these up for critique and conversation (Ratts et al., 2015). The emphasis on pedagogical change underscores the PLC as a conversation that unpacks these problems and focuses on the opportunity to infuse a more socially just educational approach to the issues under discussion. Lecturers who engage in reflective practices are better able to respond to contextual circumstances in their teaching and in so doing, refine their teaching practice (Chauraya & Brodie, 2017).

Such practices support the continuous development of effective pedagogy in response to the changing field of education, specifically as found in the South African schooling system. As lecturers engage in critical reflection and conversation, a community of practice (CoP) is formed (Ezwafahmey, 2018). This CoP serves as a way of providing a 'common conceptual framework for action' (Lee, Yuan, & Leng, 2017) which for our PLC involves deliberative encounters with the notions of a socially just orientation that will inform lecturers' pedagogical engagement. Their learning that takes place through a CoP involves active participation and engagement within a community of lecturers. Hargreaves & Fink, (2008) suggests that the reflexive nature of the CoPs would likely lead to the construction of attenuated and adaptively identities that are better able to connect to the imperatives associated with productive teacher learning. It is thus learning in a community that the PLC is intended to achieve.

Personal experiences of lecturers are affected by an external policy and internal organizational. Beliefs and values about their role as a lecturer, and the type of teaching approach that they aspire to be within the political, social, institutional and personal circumstances within which they find themselves; all affect their identity as a lecturer (Hord & Hord, 2003). (Roslizam et al., 2018) defines lecturers' characters as how lecturers make sense of themselves, their knowledge and beliefs, 'dispositions, interests and orientation towards work and change'. Lecturers' identities also encompass 'the way they feel about themselves professionally, emotionally and politically given the conditions of their work' (Khairul Anuar, Walsh, Mallaburn, & Brundrett, 2017). New experiences influence and lead to the modification and formation of new belief systems for lecturers or a shift in their pedagogical approach, and it is at the intersection of these beliefs and experience that lecturers make professional instructional decisions and open themselves up to new pedagogic possibilities (Abdul Rasid, Shamsudin, & Khuzaini, 2014). These professional identities can, therefore, be 'complex and dynamic constructions, never fully or finally achieved but continually re achieved and re-defined'.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

This study is using a quantitative approach. The sample includes five universities in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The samples are students from the language course at the university. The selection criteria for the case study are: (1) to be a university student at degree level; (2) are willing to provide information and to participate in this research; and (3) to be at an organization that adheres to a professional learning community approach. Data collection was undertaken to respond to the objectives of this study.

3.2. Data Collection and Instrument

All participants completed the research surveys assessing their perception of how well the PLC's dimension has been implemented in the university setting in a language course. The Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA) questionnaire (Olivier, Hipp, & Huffman, 2003) was employed in this study. The survey that consisted of 56 items was combining five Likert's scales in measuring three dimensions of PLC, i.e. shared values, vision & mission; collective learning and application and leadership & supportive sharing.

4. Findings

The data were analyzed using correlation and regression analysis by the method of structural equation modelling. The correlational study was applied to test the assumption of whether there is a statistical relationship between the variables. Hence, a bootstrapping analysis using structural equation modelling was used to test the

mediating effect on the relationship between shared vision & mission and collective learning application with language learning through leadership & supportive sharing.

4.1. Correlation between Shared Vision & Mission, Leadership & Supportive Sharing, Collective & Learning Application toward Language Learning

Based on Table 1, the correlation analysis showed a significant relationship between enhancing language learning and collective & learning application ($r = .719, p = .000$). The relationship between the two variables was positive, indicating that the dimension of collective & learning application was directly related to the achievement of language learning among students. It also provides the perception that lecturers were having collaborative with their colleagues and implement the PLC, whose outcomes directly impact the students' language learning. Similarly, the relationship between shared vision & mission and language learning outcomes ($r = .601, p = .000$) also showed significant and positive values. It means that the higher understanding of the lectures about the vision, mission of the organization and shared the excellent values than the better the learning outcomes of the student's language. Meanwhile, a significant positive relationship was also shown between PLC implementation of leadership & supportive sharing and student language learning outcomes ($r = .719, p = .000$).

Table 1. Correlation between variable

Variable	LL	SVM	LSS	CLA
LL	1			
SVM	.625	1		
LSS	.713	.700	1	
CLA	.683	.601	.719	1

Note:
LL – Language Learning, SVM – Shared Vision & Mission, LSS- Leadership & Supportive Sharing, CLA- Collective & Learning application

Models tested are displayed in figure 1 in which it is presented by the relationship between shared vision & mission, leadership & supportive sharing, collective & learning application toward language learning. The result showed that there was a significant positive relationship between shared vision & mission with achievement in enhancing language learning among the students ($\beta = .40, p < .001$). Secondly, there was also a significant relationship between leadership & supportive sharing with achievement in enhancing language learning among the students ($\beta = .91, p < .001$). And, there was a meaningful positive relationship between teacher competence and achievement motivation ($\beta = .56, p < .001$). This hypothesis testing H1, H2 and H3 were supported. The findings concluded that when an application of PLC dimension of shared vision & mission, leadership & supportive sharing and collective & learning application value is higher, it will increase of the value in language learning among the students' achievement.

Further analysis for direct relationship showed that there was a significant relationship between shared vision & mission with leadership & supportive sharing dimension ($\beta=.16$, $p<.001$). Finally, there was also a meaningful relationship between collective & learning application with leadership & supportive sharing dimension ($\beta=.78$, $p<.001$). Hence, these results also were supported by hypothesis testing for H4 and H5. It also means that an application of PLC dimension of SVM and CLA will increase the value of LL among the students. It can be concluded with the right approach chosen by the lecturers will give a significant impact on students' performance in future. Therefore, all the dimension of PLC, providing the feedback that these new pedagogical approaches must be applied in teaching students especially in improving the students' language learning base.

Table 2. Summary of the hypotheses testing related to direct effects

Hypothesised Path	Standardised Estimate	t-value	Result
R² (LL)=			
0.591	0.404***		
SVM → LL	0.914***	0.726	Supported
LSS → LL	0.562***		Supported
CLA → LL		0.941	Supported
		0.517	
R² (SE)=			
0.841	0.164***	0.254	Supported
SVM → LSS	0.781***	0.896	Supported
CLA → LSS			

Note:

LL – Language Learning, SVM – Shared Vision & Mission, LSS- Leadership & Supportive Sharing, CLA- Collective & Learning application

4.3 Students' Performance on Language Learning

To identify the achievement in enhancing learning language among the students, inferential analysis through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) showed that 59 per cent of R2 value was determined by shared vision & mission, leadership & supportive sharing, collective & learning application. While the results from the direct relationship also indicated that 84 per cent of R2 value for leadership & supportive sharing dimension was contributed by shared vision & mission and collective & learning application dimension. The model was also indicated a good fit between the data and the model (Chisq/df= 2.185; GFI=.980; CFI=.991; TLI=.983; RMSEA=.065) (Hair et al. 1998; Kelloway, 1998; Kline, 1998).

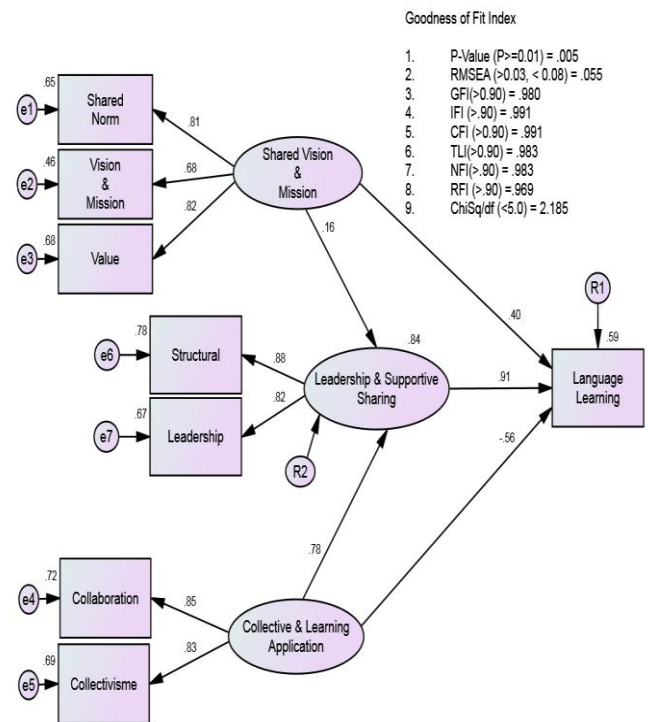


Figure 1. Results of hypotheses testing for direct relationships

Findings from both equations' analysis were predicting students' performance in enhancing their language learning were increased highly through the application of PLC by the lectures. It showed that's PLC dimensions indeed played an important role to improve students' performance in learning the language.

Table 3. The fit indices of the hypothesized model

Model	P- valu e	RMSE A	GF I	CF I	TL I	Chisq/ df
Hypothesi ze model	.000	.065	.98 0	.99 1	.98 3	2.185

Acceptable values: significant χ^2 , χ^2/df within 1-5, CFI > 0.9, TLI > 0.9, RMSEA < 0.08, *** p < 0.001

4.4 Mediating Effects of leadership & supportive sharing between shared vision & mission, collective & learning application with language learning

Based on Table 5, the results reveal the significant direct effect of shared vision & mission (SVM) on language learning (LL) (β SVM→LLB=0.401, $p<0.000$), and indirect effect of the relationship via self-efficacy (β SVM→ LSS → LL = 0.146, $p<0.000$). Given that, the direct and indirect effects between SVM and LL are significant, and the results show that LSS act as a partial mediator in the relationship between SVM and LL. Accordingly, H6 is supported.

The results further show the significant direct relationship of collective & learning application (CLA) and language learning (LL) (CLA→LL=0.561, $p>0.000$) and meaningful indirect relationship through LSS (CLA→LSS→LL=0.708, $p<0.000$). Hence, the results indicate that no mediation is observed because the β value indirect model was increased in the mediation model. It is, therefore, H7, which hypothesise the partial mediating role of LSS in the path from CLA to LL, was rejected.

Table 5. Summary of the hypotheses testing related to mediating effects

Path	Standardised Estimate		Indirect Effect	Conclusion
	Direct Effect			
	On Mediator	On LL		
SVM→LSS→LL	.160** *	.401** *	.146** *	Partial Mediation
CLA→LSS→LL	.781** *	.910** *	.709** *	No Mediation

Note: LL – Language Learning, SVM – Shared Vision & Mission, LSS- Leadership & Supportive Sharing, CLA- Collective & Learning application
*** $p < 0.001$

Overall, only one path proposing the partial mediating role of shared vision & mission to enhancing language learning. One hypothesized relationship offered in H6 was supported, and H7 was rejected.

5. Discussion

According to the results of this study, three new issues can be discussed. First, to build a professional learning community in university, the research concerns with creating a society based on the professional learning community approach to understand the vision, mission and finally shared the values. Second, the conditions for supporting the successful building of a professional learning community in university by playing a good model as a lecturer and show the leadership skills to students and organizations. Third, the obstacles to building a robust professional learning community in the university by common and learning application. In this case study, it was necessary to gain an understanding of how learning activities were taught, especially in learning language classes. As a result, one can say that these classrooms are professional learning communities of lecturers and students. In other words, learning language classes are a community of practice (Dehdary, 2017; Dima Mazlina@Siti Aishah & Abdul Rasid, 2015; Dufour, 2004; Y. Mohd Faiz et al., 2016; Siti Nafsiah Ismail, Zuraidah Abdullah, Abdul Jalil Othman, & Salwati Shafie, 2018).

In teaching languages, lecturers as core members of such a professional learning community, engaged in the process for the mutual analysis of projects and activities held at a professional learning community within the university. It was found that the lecturers wished to develop students' learning processes to enhance their learning achievement. It may imply that the lecturers intend to promote, not only their instruction but also the expected learning achievement of students by focusing on continual learning development (Khairul Anuar et al., 2017). Further, the lecturers also agreed that the most suitable form of education, for the development of learning, was the research-based teaching technique. It showed part of the credibility, responsibility and leadership characteristics applied by lecturers.

As a result, all lecturers agreed in principle to apply the research-based teaching technique in formulating the learning plan. It may reflect the fact that the professional learning community, in this university, pursued projects and activities, which are regarded as necessary, and are of interest to lecturers. Therefore, lecturers can perform well and are encouraged to make changes to improve their performance by collaborating with the members and students. The gradual progress of individual lecturers can evidence it. Consequently, one can claim that the professional learning community in this university is a so-called 'Better Practice Community'. That the development, inspection, and dissemination of a process for a specific purpose, is pursued based on sharing and learning good practice between the members themselves.

Furthermore, concerning conditions that support the successful building of a professional learning community in the university. The research found that lecturers were used the research-based teaching technique, which revealed a core instruction consisting of three issues: (1) lecturers examine students' understanding towards a teacher-specified problem base; (2) lecturers urge students to apply obtained knowledge with the explanation of a problem similar to the problem base; (3) lecturers assess students' performance, and allow students to evaluate the performance of their group and carry out a self-assessment.

These issues may be the key indicators in accounting for the success of driving lecturer's development and reaching the expected learning outcomes of students. However, lecturers may have weaknesses that should be continually developed, such as urging students to apply the knowledge they obtain from learning in their daily lives, activities, projects, tasks and assignments. Hence, to achieve higher learning language outcome, lecturers need to have leadership skills to encounter any problems related to students' achievement. That is why leadership & supportive dimension (LSS) become a partial mediator in the relationship between SVM and LL. The students' performance becomes higher when the lecturers put an effort to share what they know, what did they understand and give a good example to students, especially in sharing the aspiration from the university.

6. Conclusion

As a conclusion, the research-based teaching technique as part of PLC dimensions applied in LLS, which is the most suitable one for the development of students' learning process in university. An educational service area may use these findings in the promotion of lecturers' self-assessment and self-analysis to enhance the efficiency of the teaching and the learning process. In terms of the problems or obstacles associated with building a professional learning community in university instead of school, this research revealed that these involved the learning activities and the mutual learning process of lecturers and students. Thus, a university should include the social sector in the management process, so that they can collaborate in educational provision towards the encouragement of high efficiency in terms of educational goals based on students' qualities and the professional proficiencies of lecturers.

For future research, the investigation of the professional learning community in university addressing other subjects may allow reflection on the results and possible methods needed to build good practice involving the mutual development of lecturers and students in each issue. It may become a benchmarking process for the holistic development of an excellent professional learning community in the university not only in school, and into motivation for the exchange of knowledge among the lecturers and within educational networks. It is also regarded as socialization, allowing lecturers, as core members of a community, to improve the quality and efficiency of their instruction.

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