Influence of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) on Teacher Professional Development (TPD) in Basic Schools in the Tamale Metropolis

Influence of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) on Teacher Professional Development (TPD) in Basic Schools in the Tamale Metropolis

[1*]Dr. Edward Bonnituo Kankpog, [2]Mr. Muniru Sulemana, [3]Dr. Cecilia Alimatu Issaka

[1,3] Department of Educational Foundations Studies, University for Development Studies

[2]Tamale Metro Education Office

https://orcid.org/0009-0007-0597-2692

Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to examine the influence of professional learning communities (PLCs) on teacher professional development in basic schools in the Tamale Metropolis.

Methodology: The study employed a qualitative research approach. A case study design was employed, and 20 teachers, head teachers, and school improvement support officers (SISO), were interviewed. This study used a self-constructed semi-structured interview (SSI) guide to collect data. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data.

Findings: The study revealed that professional learning communities significantly enhance skills, knowledge, and collaborative learning in teachers' professional development.

Unique contribution to theory, practice, and policy: The study recommends proactive measures, urging educational authorities, particularly the Ghana Education Service, to enhance awareness and understanding of the need for organizing professional learning communities among basic school teachers in the Tamale metropolis.

Keywords: *Professional Learning Communities, Collaboration, Motivation, Learning Outcomes, Education.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are collaborative groups of educators that work together to enhance teaching practices, develop professional skills, and ultimately improve student learning outcomes (Williams, 2013). The concept was first established in the United States in the 1990s and has subsequently spread globally as an effective technique for teacher professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Within the scope of the Tamale Metropolis, the impact of professional learning communities on the professional development of basic school teachers is critical. As educational systems worldwide change, PLCs have become an effective tool for improving academic performance and aiding teachers' professional development (Harris, Jones, & Huffman, 2017). Over the last decade, the use of PLCs has shifted from intra-school partnerships to inter-school networks, reflecting changes in the educational environment (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Collaboration among teachers in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is beneficial in amplifying the impact of professional development activities, which are recognized as critical to improving educational quality (Harris et al., 2017). According to current research, instructors who participate in networked PLCs can significantly increase their professional learning, especially during the early, dynamic stages of development (Prenger, Poortman, & Handelzalts, 2017). As the societal landscape rapidly changes, there is an increasing emphasis on school improvement to meet the evolving demands of the twenty-first century (Antinluoma, Ilomaki & Toom, 2021). Educators and administrators must acquire new knowledge acceleratedly (Antinluoma et al., 2021).

High-level knowledge workers in education must continually increase their expertise and adapt to changing circumstances (Poortman, Brown & Schildkamp, 2022). To address this, providing educators with high-quality, ongoing professional development is critical to fulfilling their commitments (Prenger et al., 2017). PLC cooperation allows teachers to reassess their techniques, improving instruction (Carpenter, 2017). According to Carpenter (2017), teacher involvement in PLCs is a viable professional training strategy because instructor collaboration in these groups has been linked to increased student learning outcomes.

The complexity of the problems facing education in a rapidly changing world outstrips the capacities of any single school, necessitating collaboration among schools and networks (Bentley, 2012). Recognizing educators' critical role in the education sector, countries such as Ghana have prioritized ongoing professional development for educators, incorporating initiatives such as professional learning communities into the curriculum to improve educators' professional competency (Poortman et al., 2022).

However, pre-service training does not educate teachers to face barriers in a rapidly changing world (Juma et al., 2017). Opportunities for lifelong learning are critical to enhancing classroom practices and teacher education (Tang, 2020). The importance of in-service teacher professional development has been disregarded in Ghana's efforts to improve education, which have traditionally focused on preparing new teachers (Abakah, 2022). Authorities emphasize the importance of in-service training and education in response to local research findings showing the link between teacher effectiveness and student learning (Abakah, 2019).

A focus on in-service training becomes essential in Ghana since teacher development, advancement, and training opportunities are deemed inadequate (Carpenter, 2017). Following the introduction a national curriculum based on standards, the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service collaborated to launch initiatives such as professional learning communities and continued professional development for instructors. These curricula will better prepare educators to deal with the demands of a continually changing educational environment (Poortman et al., 2022).

The complexities of teacher professional development highlight the importance of constant and diversified learning opportunities. According to (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner (2017), the three most common types of professional development for teachers are one-time seminars, in-class observations, and recurrent workshops. These channels provide platforms for content-focused education, active learning opportunities, collaborative support, coaching, coaching models, feedback and reflective practice integration, and ongoing professional development. There is presently no universally agreed description for the professional learning community; hence, attempts have been made to distinguish it from professional development and define its key characteristics (Huusela, 2020).

To avoid dilution and comprehend the term's practical application, the phrase "professional learning community" requires clear definitions (Younker, 2021). This accuracy is critical for assisting professional learning communities in their development. To build a culture of cooperation and inquiry among educators, individualistic techniques must give way to collaborative goals, which PLCs encourage (Younker, 2021).

The significance of PLCs grows as educators deal with the challenges offered by a rapidly changing educational environment. Understanding goals, aligning community goals, providing structure and guidance, fostering empowerment and collaboration, promoting a growth culture, establishing shared learning and assessments, holding regular meetings and collaboration, encouraging a spirit of inquiry, reflection, and cooperation, and ensuring strong facilitation are just a few of the steps involved in forming and maintaining PLCs (Carpenter, 2017).

In the context of Tamale Metropolis' basic schools, it is critical to understand how professional learning communities influence teachers' professional growth. Because of the dynamic nature of education, instructors' changing roles, and the need for continuous improvement, a detailed examination of PLCs' effects on teacher professional development is essential. This study will contribute to the ongoing discussion on realistic measures to increase teacher professional development and raise the overall standard of basic education.

According to Du Plessis and Muzaffar (2010), professional learning communities, or PLCs, have emerged as a revolutionary strategy for teacher professional development that promotes collaboration and contextualized learning. PLCs have grown in popularity worldwide, particularly in Ghana, due to the demand for a more dynamic and socially involved form of teacher development (Du Plessis & Muzaffar, 2010). This innovative strategy is gaining popularity across borders, particularly in Ghana, where PLCs have been recognized by the National Teaching Council, which is legally mandated to give teacher licenses, as a driving

force behind constructive school change. The Ministry of Education highlights the importance of PLCs in enhancing teacher collaboration in the classroom and moving beyond simply obtaining new knowledge.

PLCs function as structured in-service training avenues, providing a platform for teachers to learn from one another and share best practices. The Ministry of Education in Ghana acknowledges professional learning communities as a powerful staff development approach with the potential to initiate transformative shifts within educational institutions (Huusela, 2020). In this collaborative learning environment, teachers are not just recipients of knowledge but valuable resources for each other, fostering a culture of mutual support and continuous learning.

PLCs employ diverse approaches and strategies to fulfill their objectives, including demonstration lessons, peer teaching, teaching and learning materials preparation, and class management (Huusela, 2020). These activities enhance teachers' competence by promoting collegiality and exchanging effective teaching practices. The global application of PLCs extends beyond national borders, with successful implementations observed in education, healthcare, business, and other professional domains (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016). In the realm of education, PLCs have demonstrated their efficacy in improving student learning outcomes through collaborative efforts focused on shared norms, reflective dialogue, and a commitment to continuous learning (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016).

The success of PLCs lies in their ability to create a unified vision and set of principles, fostering a culture centred on mutual respect, cooperation, shared accountability, and an inquiry-based approach (Carey, 2022). Effective PLCs use data analysis, goal design, and individual and collaborative learning to achieve their objectives, demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement and student success (Carey, 2022). Teacher professional development stands as a dynamic and intricate concept within the realm of education, emphasizing a continual process where teachers participate in structured learning experiences to enrich their knowledge, skills, and overall effectiveness in the classroom (Mensah & Jonathan, 2016). Teacher professional development recognizes that the teaching profession is far from static, necessitating an ongoing commitment to growth and adaptation to meet the ever-evolving needs of students and the educational landscape.

In essence, TPD expands beyond conventional notions of in-service training or workshops, encompassing a spectrum of activities designed to address the holistic needs of teachers, acknowledging their roles as both instructors and mentors (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016). The fundamental philosophy underlying TPD is grounded in the belief that well-equipped and continually developed teachers are better positioned to foster positive learning outcomes for their students. In Ghana, where TPD is particularly emphasised, the National Teaching Council (NTC) plays a pivotal role in shaping the conceptual framework of teacher development (Carey, 2022).

Additionally, TPD in Ghana recognizes that the development of teachers is a continuum that extends from pre-service training to ongoing professional growth throughout their careers

(Mensah & Jonathan, 2016). The government's commitment to this continuum is evidenced by initiatives like the In-Service Teacher Training (INSET) policy in basic education, which establishes a systematic system for continuing professional development and aligns with the overarching goals of national education standards.

The concept of TPD also aligns with global trends emphasising the importance of a teacher's role in shaping the quality of education. TPD is not just about complying with standards; it is about empowering teachers to be reflective practitioners who continuously seek ways to improve their instructional methods, assessment strategies, and overall teaching efficacy (Omar, 2014). In this way, TPD catalyzes positive change within the educational ecosystem.

Furthermore, TPD recognizes the diverse roles that teachers play within the community and society at large. Beyond the classroom, teachers are viewed as community leaders and contributors to the broader development agenda. Therefore, TPD initiatives often incorporate elements that foster community engagement, leadership development, and the cultivation of a collaborative professional network (Essel et al., 2009). In essence, the concept of TPD represents a paradigm shift in how we perceive the role of teachers in the 21st century (Huusela, 2020). It acknowledges the multifaceted nature of teaching, requiring a blend of pedagogical expertise, ethical values, and a commitment to lifelong learning (Abakah et al., 2022). TPD in Ghana and globally serves as a cornerstone for building a cadre of educators who are well-versed in educational theories and equipped to address modern education's complex challenges with resilience, innovation, and a deep sense of professional responsibility.

Although many studies have been carried out in different districts and regions across the country, it seems that no such study has ever been conducted in the Northern Region, particularly in the Tamale metropolis of the Northern Region. For instance, a study conducted by Dampson (2021), to assess the effectiveness of PLCs in Ghanaian basic schools using a mixed method found that the level of PLCs in basic schools is low in all six dimensions except shared and supportive leadership. The study recommended that the Ghana Education Service should build the capacities of teachers to understand the need to participate in regular professional learning communities' activities in their schools.

Similarly, in his study, Abakah (2019), found that continuing education, workshops, and in-service training dominated the CPD practices of Ghanaian teachers. Though there was sufficient evidence of teachers' involvement in informal learning activities, such practices lacked recognition and rarely expanded into a broader notion of teacher professional development. Teachers also had varied learning needs for their development, including pedagogical content knowledge and ICT skills for personal growth and classroom use. While participation in CPD increased teachers' learning, some participants, on the other hand, expressed discontent with programs that did not match their development needs. In its conclusion, the study proposes guidelines for developing effective CPD for basic schoolteachers in Ghana, where teacher consultation and learning needs feature significantly. The study thus recommends enacting and implementing a more coherent CPD policy to guide teachers' practice. CPD for Ghanaian teachers must integrate more sociocultural models that foster collaboration and social interaction in learning. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate

the influence of professional learning communities on teacher professional development in basic education in the Tamale Metropolis of the Northern Region of Ghana.

1.1 Research Questions

1. What are the contributions of professional learning communities on teacher professional development in basic schools in the Tamale Metropolis?
2. What are the challenges facing the organization of professional learning communities in basic schools in the Tamale Metropolis?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Philosophy

The study's conceptual foundation was the constructivist paradigm assumption of how knowledge is received. The interpretative paradigm is associated with subjectivist epistemology and the realism school of thought. Interpretivism is a study paradigm in the social sciences that maintains that reality is subjective and constructed by humans (Hiller, 2016). The researchers relied on interpretivism for the study because the study aimed to explore the lived experiences of teachers and headteachers and how professional learning communities influence teacher professional development. Interpretivism, rooted in idealistic philosophy, has been used to group many philosophical systems, including social constructivism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics (Hiller, 2016). In interpretive approaches, interviews and other sense-based data collection methods are used. This fitted perfectly into the researcher's data collection instrument for the study.

2.2 Research Design

A case study research design was used for this study. Case studies have been increasingly used in educational research. Case study research delves deeply into a real-life phenomenon while considering its contextual background (Priya, 2021). An individual, a group, an organization, an event, a problem, or anomalies are all examples of such cases. The case study was chosen for various reasons, including Stake 2005's interest in the issue and theoretical concerns (Priya, 2021).

By revealing patterns and links, case data can aid in developing, extending, and evaluating hypotheses. Through careful comparison and cross-case study, similarities and differences are demonstrated, showing how these influence results. Each case is analyzed separately to compare the mechanisms revealed, allowing theoretical inferences to be developed. Similarly, case studies will enable a researcher to investigate a phenomenon in its natural context. By examining the case in its natural setting, researchers can capture the environmental, social, cultural, and organizational variables that affect the phenomenon under investigation. The contextual analysis improves the findings' validity and applicability to different settings.

Again, case studies can be quite valuable for theory formulation and development. By thoroughly investigating a case, researchers can generate new ideas, improve on existing theories, or develop new theoretical frameworks. The case study insights aid in developing knowledge within a specific field.

2.3 Population and Sample Size of the Study

The study targeted a diverse population comprising teachers, headteachers, and school improvement support officers affiliated with the Tamale Metropolitan Education Directorate. The total population for the study was 3,516 individuals, comprising 1,692 male teachers, 1,552 female teachers, 164 male headteachers, 93 female headteachers, as well as 12 male and 3 female school improvement support officers. The key focal points of analysis for this research were the teachers, headteachers, and school improvement support officers across various schools and circuits within the Tamale metropolis. The term "basic schools" in this context encompasses Kindergarten (KG), Primary, and Junior High Schools.

2.4 Data Collection Instrument

The instrument for this study is a self-constructed semi-structured interview guide. The semi-structured interview guide consisted of two sections, each with 5 open-ended questions. The first section contained the demographic characteristics of respondents. The demographic characteristics of respondents included age, gender, qualification, level of respondent is teaching, and marital status of the respondents. Section two collected data on the contributions of PLCs on teacher professional development in basic schools in the Tamale metropolis.

Overall, the SSI guide contained ten open-ended questions. The questions cut across and sought information on all the study's objectives and questions. This, as expected, allowed participants to express themselves. Furthermore, the questions allowed varying shades of issues to come up on the subject matter under study. A semi-structured interview is a data collection approach that involves, asking participants open-ended questions, and following up with follow-up probing questions to investigate their responses and the main issue further (Doody & Noonan, 2013). In this study, the researchers obtained the needed information during the interview by recording participants using an electronic device and taking notes. Multiple recording devices were used in this study in that they complemented one another in terms of data recording by the researcher.

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

The researchers took an introduction letter from the University for Development Studies' Education Department to collect data. The introductory letter was delivered to the Tamale Metropolitan Director of Education. The researchers also took an introductory letter from the Metropolitan Director of Education to head teachers to seek permission to engage teachers as respondents for the study. In this study, ethical considerations were adhered to. This includes gaining access, informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity. Obtaining access is the process of entering a particular group or organization and ensuring that those associated with it would take part as respondents. Informed consent is crucial when doing qualitative research on human subjects because it ensures that the subjects' rights are respected and that they are aware of the study's key findings. Obtaining informed consent often entails obtaining a written consent form that includes all required consent elements and distributing it to prospective participants. Confidentiality in qualitative research refers to the obligation of researchers to

prevent unapproved access to participants' data. It comprises safeguarding participant identities and personal information against unauthorized access or disclosure.

The researchers pre-tested the data collection instrument with five respondents selected from the various circuits in the directorate. After the pre-test, there were two weeks before the post-test was conducted. This ensured that respondents did not replicate the same responses for the interview questions. The same instrument was re-administered to the same respondents for the post-test. The post-test helped the researchers refine the SSI guide to gather the needed data for this study.

3. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

What are the contributions of professional learning communities on teacher professional development in basic schools in the Tamale metropolis?

Thematic analysis was used to analyze this research question, and the responses are illustrated as follows:

Respondents highlighted those enhanced skills for teachers that lead to improved instructional practices, and the overall professional development of teachers directly contributes to enhanced learner outcomes. Respondents emphasized that the benefits from PLCs are translated into improved student learning outcomes. The qualitative analysis of participants' responses underscored the multifaceted contributions of professional learning communities to teachers' professional development. From skills and knowledge enhancement to fostering a culture of lifelong learning, improving instructional practices, and promoting a positive work environment, PLCs emerged as integral catalysts for positive change in education. The findings align with contemporary literature on the subject, emphasizing the transformative influence of collaborative professional development initiatives.

A respondent indicated that PLCs offer a good platform for teachers to share ideas and learn new methods for handling challenging topics in the classroom. She said that:

"Yes, because professional learning communities are valuable platforms for teachers to collaborate, share ideas, and learn from each other, ultimately enhancing their skills and knowledge."

Another respondent noted that PLCs foster a sense of teamwork and collaboration among teachers. He shared that:

"PLCs increase collaboration and promote collaboration among teachers, fostering a sense of teamwork and camaraderie. Teachers collaborate to share their knowledge, expertise, and innovative ideas, strengthening the team spirit. PLCs provide a supportive environment where teachers can openly discuss challenges, seek advice, and receive constructive feedback. This supportive atmosphere encourages teachers to share their ideas without fear of judgment, fostering a sense of unity and trust within the team."

Furthermore, respondents indicated that PLCs provide a platform for teachers to engage constructively on how to support each other to solve challenging tasks in the teaching and learning process. A respondent had this to say during the interview session:

"Through PLCs, teachers can collectively tackle instructional challenges and find effective solutions. By leveraging the diverse expertise within the group, teachers can brainstorm new ideas, explore different perspectives, and develop approaches".

Another respondent shared how teachers can share instructional ideas and materials through PLC sessions through peer teaching and review of others' work. A respondent remarked that:

"PLCs facilitate sharing resources, materials, and best practices among teachers. Teachers can exchange lesson plans, teaching strategies, and classroom resources, which helps improve the overall quality of instruction. Again, during PLCs, teachers learn how to analyze student performance data, identify areas of improvement, and tailor their teaching strategies to meet the needs of their students better".

Also, another respondent pointed out that PLCs can serve as a conduit to boost teachers' confidence and motivate teachers to engage in co-curricular activities in the school. He observed that:

"*Professional learning communities boost teachers' motivation and engagement in their profession; the respondent explained that through networking and engaging with like-minded educators, teachers feel supported, inspired, and more enthusiastic about their instructional practice, ultimately leading to improved outcomes."*

Again, a respondent indicated how PLCs can help teachers learn and develop their teaching skills to support their learners in the classroom. A respondent stated that:

"PLCs provide opportunities for personalized professional development. Teachers can target specific areas of growth or interest, allowing them to engage in focused discussions and acquire knowledge and skills tailored to their needs. This personalized approach promotes professional growth and empowers educators to address their unique challenges. PLCs empower educators to take ownership of their professional growth and contribute to improving their school or district. By participating in PLCs, teachers can develop leadership skills, take on new roles, and influence decision-making processes, fostering a sense of empowerment and efficacy".

During the interview, respondents also shared how PLCs can help teachers continuously update their knowledge and skills by engaging in activities that empower them to adopt new teaching methods. A respondent remarked that:

"PLCs promote a culture of continuous improvement. Educators engage in ongoing reflection, data analysis, and dialogue, seeking to refine instructional practices, implement innovative strategies, and adapt to evolving educational needs. This commitment to continuous improvement benefits both teachers and students, as it supports a dynamic and responsive learning environment. Again, engaging in PLCs often leads to increased job satisfaction among educators. These communities' collaborative and supportive nature cultivates a positive

work environment, boosts morale, and creates a sense of professional fulfilment. Teachers feeling dignified and helped will contribute to their overall work fulfilment and commitment to their profession. Professional learning communities provide many benefits, from enhanced collaboration and reflective practice to improved student achievement and job satisfaction".

Again, another respondent observed that PLCs empower teachers to engage learners in meaningful activities in the teaching and learning process, ultimately leading to enhanced learning outcomes for learners. She noted that:

"We cannot be talking about the benefits of PLCs without indicating that it leads to an enhanced learner's outcome because teachers, after getting the new skills and knowledge, the improved instructional practice has to use them in class and the final beneficiary who is the learner should have a direct benefit which is realized in the performance of the learner."

What are the challenges facing the organization of professional learning communities in basic schools in the Tamale metropolis?

Thematic analysis was used to analyze this research question, and the responses are illustrated as follows:

During the interview, respondents shared the challenges of successfully organizing PLCs in basic schools. They indicated that headteachers must be committed to organizing teachers to participate in PLC sessions to ensure that teachers do not deliberately refuse to avail themselves of PLC sessions. One respondent indicated that:

"Headteachers must demonstrate their commitment and interest to have successful PLC sessions. They have to organize the teachers to develop an action plan for the term. Organize and remind teachers even if it is on the timetable. So, if the headteacher is not supportive, the programme will not be held, and for that matter, it will fail".

Another headteacher reiterated the need for headteachers to exhibit strong support for professional learning communities in their schools. She revealed that:

"Lack of support from headteachers can impede the establishment and effectiveness of PLCs in basic schools. Headteachers should recognize the value of collaborative learning and provide the neccessary support to foster a culture of professional growth within the school community. So, I wholeheartedly agree that headteachers should champion the organization of PLCs and encourage teachers to participate actively. Their support can break down barriers, such as time constraints or lack of resources."

Also, another respondent noted that when headteachers are not committed to the organization of PLCs in their schools by providing learning resources, teachers will not be motivated to participate in PLC sessions in the school. She observed that:

"I agree that lack of support from headteachers poses a significant barrier to the organization of PLCs in basic schools. When headteachers provide learning resources, allocate time for collaboration, and encourage participation, it motivates teachers to engage in meaningful professional development activities, without a doubt. Headteachers serve as instructional

leaders, and their endorsement of PLCs can profoundly impact their success. When headteachers prioritize and actively advocate for PLCs, it creates a supportive environment. "

During the interview, respondents shared how the workload on the part of teachers was a challenge in successfully organizing PLCs in schools within the Tamale metropolis. A respondent indicated that:

"*Heavy workloads make it difficult for teachers to participate actively in professional learning communities. Teachers often have a packed schedule with teaching responsibilities, marking learners' exercises, preparing a scheme of learning and lesson plans, marking and recording attendance registers, learners support services, and attending to administrative tasks, leaving little time for professional learning communities' organization, teachers' busy schedules make it challenging for teachers to find common available time for meetings and discussions within professional learning communities."*

Similarly, a respondent remarked that:

"*Workloads can lead to teacher exhaustion and burnout, hampering their motivation and energy to engage actively in professional learning communities. Teachers struggle to balance their workload and prioritize self-care to participate effectively in professional learning communities. Administrative tasks and paperwork consume a significant portion of teachers' time, limiting their ability to engage in professional learning communities.*"

Another respondent believed that teachers tasked to manage large classrooms in schools are usually overwhelmed with work and that their participation in professional learning communities is mostly impeded. She remarked that:

"*Workload impedes the organization of professional learning communities. For instance, teachers with large classes may not be able to mark exercises before the time to sit for the PLCs meeting on the scheduled days and time; the teacher may not want to send the marking of the exercises to the house, and this will force the teacher to delay in coming in for the PLCs session. Again, if a co-curricular activity like football is taken the whole instructional period, like taking learners out of school for games, and teachers are to be present to guide learners at the centres, PLCs scheduled for that day will not be done because teachers will be engaged in other activities outside their schools*".

Respondents during the interview also shared how the choice of topics for PLC sessions in schools could impede the successful organization of PLCs in schools. A respondent indicated that when PLC topics align with teachers' interests, they will be motivated to participate actively in sessions. She remarked that:

"*Yes, teachers exhibit passive attitudes during PLC sessions because of a lack of engagement. Teachers feel disengaged or uninterested in the topics or discussions taking place during PLC sessions. This could be due to a misalignment between their needs or interests and the discussed content. If teachers don't see the relevance or value of the discussions, they adopt a passive attitude. Also, teachers often have numerous responsibilities and limited time. If PLC sessions are squeezed into a packed schedule, teachers may be mentally preoccupied or*

overwhelmed with other tasks. Consequently, they might be unable to engage or actively participate fully during these sessions.”

Another respondent indicated that when teachers feel safe during PLC sessions, they will be motivated to share their opinions and critique other participants' contributions in the session. He shared that:

"Yes, in some cases, teachers exhibit a passive attitude during PLC sessions due to a fear of being judged or criticized by their peers or superiors. They might be concerned about openly sharing their thoughts or ideas, particularly if they believe their opinions are not widely accepted or fear negative repercussions. Again, for PLC sessions to be effective, there needs to be an environment of psychological safety where teachers feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, sharing challenges, and engaging in constructive dialogue. If teachers perceive a lack of trust or fear negative consequences for speaking up, they may adopt a passive attitude to protect themselves”.

Another respondent was of the view that schools must promote inclusivity for all teachers during PLC sessions to ensure that all teachers feel safe participating in sessions. She indicated that PLC sessions that value diversity will bring out the best in participants during sessions. She remarked that:

“Yes, if the facilitator does not create an inclusive and supportive environment, teachers may feel less motivated to participate actively. Facilitators must encourage collaboration, listen actively, and ensure everyone's voices are heard to foster engagement. I also believe that teachers' past experiences with PLC sessions can influence their attitudes. If they had negative experiences, such as unproductive or poorly managed sessions, they may become disenchanted and exhibit a passive attitude as a result”.

Similarly, another respondent believed that when teachers understand the value of PLCs, they will also appreciate how that contributes to their professional development in the long run. He indicated that teachers will participate actively in PLC sessions when they understand its importance. She said that:

"Teachers exhibit passive attitude during PLCs sessions because they lack adequate education about the programme; some teachers still lack information about PLCs and therefore show lackadaisical behaviour during PLCs meetings as they claim not being educated by the Ghana education service to enable them to take part in the programme."

Respondents in the study also shared how the careful planning of PLC activities could help organize PLC sessions successfully in basic schools within the Tamale metropolis. She noted that:

“To me, PLC sessions must be well planned before their implementation, so when the school cannot plan the programme well, it will not be well executed on the day of execution. Planning means getting the topic, informing the lead facilitator ahead of time, preparing the venue, and providing materials needed for the successful session”.

Again, another respondent indicated that the support of managers of educational institutions was crucial in the successful organization of PLC sessions in basic schools across the Tamale metropolis. He noted that:

"Trust, support, and accountability by school managers are fundamentals for effective collaboration within PLCs. Suppose there is a lack of trust, support, and accountability between teachers and managers. In that case, if communication channels are not open and supportive, they can hinder meaningful discussions and prevent sharing ideas and best practices. Again, resistance to change by teachers and headteachers can lead to poor execution of PLC meetings in basic schools because PLCs often require a shift in traditional teaching practices and a willingness to embrace new approaches. If there is resistance to change among teachers and headteachers or a reluctance to adopt collaborative practices, it can impede the effectiveness of PLCs".

Respondents during the interview also shared how the lack of funds for schools to organize PLC sessions was hindering the organization of PLCs in schools. She stated that:

"*Funding is a major challenge facing basic schools in organizing PLCs. For example, schools are not given enough funds to buy teaching and learning resources to be used during PLC sessions, and they give at least something to outsiders when invited as facilitators. Teachers are not given water to drink during PLC sessions, and this could lead to loss of interest and lack of concentration, and in the long run, PLC meetings will not be successful.*

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

What are the contributions of professional learning communities on teacher professional development in basic schools in the Tamale Metropolis?
The findings from the study revealed that the contributions of professional learning communities (PLCs) are enormous and critical to teacher professional development. The study further revealed that PLC is beneficial and vital to the professional development of teachers in basic schools. The study also revealed that the ability of basic schools to hold regular PLC sessions in addition to the application or implementation of the suitable skills and knowledge learned during PLC sessions would lead to an improved learning outcome among learners. This confirms the findings of (Carey, 2022; Dampson, 2021), who indicated that PLC has several benefits for teachers and learners. This finding implies that regular PLC sessions should be held in basic educational institutions nationwide.

Again, the study revealed that collaborative learning among teachers through PLCs contributes to teachers' professional development. Respondents during the interview indicated how PLC has brought them together and shared knowledge among themselves. They also expressed how PLC has brought unity among them due to their regular interactions. Their ability to share knowledge and air their opinions during PLC sessions with the headteachers on matters concerning the school has brought about an open administration in the school. The finding supported the earlier findings of Jamaludin et al. (2022), who found that PLC builds effective team spirit, improves trust among colleagues, and creates an enabling environment for

openness and sharing of new ideas and resources. This finding implies that PLC is an effective means of fostering effective collaboration among teaching staff in an institution.

Also, during the interview, respondents revealed that teachers develop leadership skills through professional learning communities. Teachers who lead regular PLC sessions will develop the skills of making presentations. Teachers will also learn how to speak with confidence. These leadership skills developed through PLCs will help them control their emotions among colleagues and in classrooms during lesson delivery. This finding is confirmed by (Carey, 2022). This finding implies that the Ghana Education Service should motivate teachers to participate in professional learning communities in their schools.

Furthermore, the study also revealed that an improved instructional practice is another contribution of professional learning communities (PLCs). This is exhibited as teachers come together to share new and improved teaching methods and skills in handling challenging topics in specific disciplines, such as literacy and numeracy, at the basic levels. This will result in improved teaching skills. Through regular PLC sessions, teachers learn and apply the best pedagogies to improve the learning outcomes of learners at basic schools. This confirmed the findings of (Mensah & Jonathan, 2016), which indicated that PLC could be harnessed to improve teachers' instructional practice and students' learning outcomes. The implication is that the headteachers of basic schools must ensure that the professional learning communities are observed.

What are the challenges facing the organization of professional learning communities in basic schools in the Tamale metropolis?

During the interview, many respondents revealed that the major challenge of PLC organization in basic schools in the Tamale Metropolis is teachers' passive attitude during PLC sessions. Many respondents agreed that teachers' low interest in participating during PLC sessions significantly hindered the regular organizing of PLCs. They attributed this to the fact that the very people who were to keep the session interested showed low commitment to the programme. This is supported by the earlier findings of Chua et al. (2020), which established that the passive attitudes of teachers exhibited during PLC sessions are a barrier to the effective organization of PLCs in public basic schools. The implication is that PLCs will not be effectively conducted when the participants are not interested in the programme.

Again, the study's findings revealed that the lack of support and commitment from basic school heads was another challenge facing the organization of PLCs. This is demonstrated by heads who want to say they are not provided with the necessary materials for PLC organization. Headteachers who don't commit to PLCs in their schools will have low output in PLC sessions and poor lesson delivery, leading to low learning outcomes for learners. This supports the earlier findings of (Carey, 2022), which indicated that the most commonly cited inhibitor for teachers to take up school-based and off-site INSET activity is a lack of support from the head teacher. This finding implies that headteachers should demonstrate commitment, support, and will in organizing the staff for PLC sessions in their schools.

www.carijournals.org

In addition, the findings revealed that workload is another challenge facing basic schools in the Tamale Metropolis as the teachers complain about the time to be used for marking learners' exercises, writing lesson plans, preparing teaching and learning resources, and engaging in other co-curricular activities. All these activities increase the workload of teachers, leading to fatigue. When fatigue sets in, teachers become uninterested in PLC sessions. The attention that will be given to other activities will negatively affect the organization of PLCs. This is confirmed by (Chua, Thien, Lim, Tan & Guan, 2020), who found excessive workload on teachers as a significant hindrance to PLCs. The implication is that if the workload on teachers is not checked, PLC organizations in our institutions will not be effective.

Similarly, the study findings revealed that lack of education on the relevance of professional learning communities was another challenge facing the organization of PLCs in basic schools in the Tamale Metropolis. Respondents observed that most teachers do not appreciate the importance of PLCs to professional development. In some instances, the knowledge or the information they have is scanty. This finding is corroborated by Chua et al. (2020), who discovered two unresolved difficulties hindering PLCs' organization, including teachers' misunderstanding of PLCs. The implication is that teachers should be well informed about PLCs because people perish for lack of knowledge.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study on the influence of professional learning communities on teachers' professional development in basic schools in the Tamale Metropolis revealed that professional learning communities are critical for teacher professional development. Firstly, it enhanced teachers' skills and knowledge leading to improved instructional practices and a positive attitude to work. Secondly, professional learning communities promote teamwork among teachers thereby increasing teachers' job satisfaction. In addition, professional learning communities improve students' learning achievements based on the updated skills and knowledge teachers acquire from professional learning community activities. However, it was revealed that to make professional learning communities' function well, there is a need for school management to demonstrate a strong commitment toward the organisation and activities of the professional learning communities. Also, heavy workloads on teachers such as large class sizes, and co-curricular activities were found to have a tremendous influence on the organisation of Professional learning communities. Finally, it was revealed that effective facilitators of Professional learning activities would determine the quality and success of the Professional learning activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ghana Education Service should endeavour to educate all teaching staff to appreciate the importance of Professional Learning Communities to their professional development.

The Ghana Education Service should also endeavour to strengthen the supervision and monitoring units at the district and regional offices to support, supervise and monitor PLC sessions in all basic schools. The study underscored the importance of understanding the relevance of teachers' professional development and the need for teachers to update their skills

and knowledge. The Ministry of Education should formulate policies towards the operation and organization of PLC sessions to streamline its organizations in schools.

REFERENCES

Abakah, E. (2019). *Continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers in Ghana: An exploration of basic school teachers' practices and experiences* (Unpublished doctorial thesis). University of Technology, Sydney.

Abakah, E. (2022). Exploring the continuing professional development (CPD) needs of basic schoolteachers in Ghana. *International Journal of Teacher Education and Professional Development (IJTEPD)*, 5(1), 1–15.

Abakah, E., Widin, J., & Ameyaw, E. K. (2022). Continuing professional development (CPD) practices among basic school teachers in the central region of Ghana. *Sage Open*, 12(2), 21582440221094596.

Antinluoma, M., Ilomäki, L., & Toom, A. (2021). Practices of professional learning communities. *Frontiers in Education*, 6, 89.

Bentley, T. (2012). *Learning beyond the classroom: Education for a changing world*. Routledge.

Buttram, J. L., & Farley-Ripple, E. N. (2016). The role of principals in professional learning communities. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 15(2), 192–220.

Carey, C. J. (2022). *Professional Learning Communities: A Decade of Implementation*. College of Saint Elizabeth.

Carpenter, D. (2017). Collaborative inquiry and the shared workspace of professional learning communities. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 31(7), 1069–1091.

Chua, W. C., Thien, L. M., Lim, S. Y., Tan, C. S., & Guan, T. E. (2020). Unveiling the practices and challenges of professional learning community in a Malaysian Chinese secondary school. *Sage Open*, 10(2), 2158244020925516.

Dampson, D. G. (2021). Effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities in Ghanaian Basic Schools through the Lenses of Sociocultural Theory. *Journal of Educational Issues*, 7(2), 338–354.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). Teacher education around the world: What can we learn from international practice? *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(3), 291–309.

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development.*

Doody, O., & Noonan, M. (2013). Preparing and conducting interviews to collect data. *Nurse Researcher*, 20(5).

Du Plessis, J., & Muzaffar, I. (2010). Professional Learning Communities in the Teachers' College: A Resource for Teacher Educators. *EQUIP1*.

Essel, R., Badu, E., Owusu-Boateng, W., & Saah, A. A. (2009). In-service training: An essential element in the professional development of teachers. *Malaysian Journal of Distance Education*, 11(2), 55–64.

Harris, A., Jones, M., & Huffman, J. B. (2017). *Teachers leading educational reform: The power of professional learning communities*. Routledge.

Hiller, J. (2016). *Epistemological foundations of objectivist and interpretivist research*.

Huusela, K. (2020). *Developing a professional learning community in a Ghanaian School: Teachers' Perceptions of Important Characteristics of PLC*.

Jamaludin, A., Hung, D., Toh, Y., & Shaari, I. (2022). Teacher Learning Communities as Catalytic Levers for Educational Innovations in Singapore Schools. In *Diversifying Schools: Systemic Catalysts for Educational Innovations in Singapore* (pp. 211–233). Springer.

Juma, S., Lehtomäki, E., & Naukkarinen, A. (2017). Developing inclusive pre-service and in-service teacher education: Insights from Zanzibar primary school teachers. *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, 13(3).

Mensah, D. K. D., & Jonathan, A. W. (2016). Teacher professional development: Keys to basic school teachers' curriculum practice success in Ghana. *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research Method*, 3(2), 33–41.

Omar, C. (2014). The need for in-service training for teachers and its effectiveness in school. *International Journal for Innovation Education and Research*, 2(11), 1–9.

Poortman, C. L., Brown, C., & Schildkamp, K. (2022). Professional learning networks: a conceptual model and research opportunities. *Educational Research*, 64(1), 95–112.
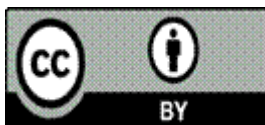
Prenger, R., Poortman, C. L., & Handelzalts, A. (2017). Factors influencing teachers' professional development in networked professional learning communities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 68, 77–90.

Priya, A. (2021). Case study methodology of qualitative research: Key attributes and navigating the conundrums in its application. *Sociological Bulletin*, *70*(1), 94–110.

Tang, K. N. (2020). The importance of soft skills acquisition by teachers in higher education institutions. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, 41(1), 22–27.

Williams, D. J. (2013). Urban education and professional learning communities. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 79(2), 31.

Younker, C. S. (2021). *Teacher Perceptions of How Relationships and School Culture Sustain Professional Learning Communities*. Concordia University Chicago.