

**The Effect of Using Professional Learning
Community (PLC) to Develop the English
Language Oral Communication**

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Abstract

The study aimed to illustrate the effect of using professional learning community (PLC) to develop the English language oral communication. The study begins with a review of literature and previous studies dealing with professional learning community (PLC) and oral communication. It also clarifies the definition of PLC, its importance, features, Philosophies beyond Professional Learning Community (PLC) in Education, online PLC and its advantages and challenges. Besides, the definition of oral communication and its elements. Finally, the research elaborates the interlink of PLC and oral communication.

Keywords: Professional learning community (PLC), oral Communication

المستخلص

هدفت الدراسة إلى توضيح أثر استخدام مجتمع التعلم المهني (PLC) في تطوير الاتصال الشفوي باللغة الإنجليزية. تبدأ الدراسة بمراجعة الأدبيات والدراسات السابقة التي تتناول مجتمع التعلم المهني (PLC) والتواصل الشفوي. كما يوضح تعريف PLC وأهميته وخصائصه وفلسفاته خارج مجتمع التعلم المهني (PLC) في التعليم و PLC عبر الإنترنت ومزاياه وتحدياته. إلى جانب تعريف الاتصال الشفوي وعناصره. أخيرًا ، يشرح البحث الترابط بين PLC والتواصل الشفوي.

Introduction

Language links different cultures and a way of communication that facilitates mutual understanding between people from different

backgrounds. Language is also a means of communication. People can exchange messages and express their views with language.

In education, English has become the primary language of communication. It is spoken by millions of people all over the world. Nowadays, almost all majors and fields use English, such as engineering, education, and economics. Therefore, it is very essential to learn English.

Besides, teachers of English language should be able to communicate meaning with their students by using target language in different meaningful contexts.

Oral communication is very crucial to all English teachers who teach a global language of almost all the world's countries. English teachers who are skilled at oral communication techniques create an interactive and a communicative learning environment. A teacher with good oral communication always makes teaching and learning easier and understandable. Good communication abilities of teacher are the basic requirement of the academic success of students, and professional success of life.

There are many approaches and projects aimed at enhancing the oral communication of English teachers as well as improving their academic preparation. Some of them are theoretical and cannot be applied practically, and their impact is limited. For this reason,

this research is based on using the inquiry Professional Learning Community (PLC) model which has real positive effect; it is an ongoing approach that can improve the oral communication of student–teachers and solve authentic problems. It is based on exchanging and sharing experience and discussing real problems. All these processes can enhance their oral communication in meaningful contexts.

A PLC is a group of practitioners working together using a structured process of inquiry to focus on a specific area of their teaching to improve learner outcomes and so raise school standards. Besides, the research evidence highlights the importance of interdependent learning and collaboration as the cornerstone of school improvement and effective professional development. It is based on teachers collectively investigate methods of overcoming barriers to their students' learning. Working in this way, as a plc, can bring many benefits but most importantly, if done well, PLCs can result in improved learner outcomes (Verscio et al, 2008; Saunders et al, 2009). In addition, PLCs enable the groups to widen their experiences and to share their most effective practice.

Literature review

First section: PLC (professional learning community)

Wilson (2016), defined the professional community of learning as (PLC) a place in which the schoolteachers and administrators continuously share learning, and act on that learning. Besides, school reform takes place when teachers engage in authentic and real professional learning communities and increased student learning is a byproduct of such communities. (PLC) also involves shared governance amongst its members that will result in a positive contribution to the change process in school improvement.

According to Brown, Horn, & King, (2018), the concept of professional learning community tends to be used as a description of combination and partnership of individuals with a common interest in education, such as a grade-level teaching team, a school committee, a high school department, an entire school district, a state department of education, or even a national professional organization. However, the focus is more on learning than on teaching, and collaboration, leadership and accountability are the clues to successful PLCs.

Philosophies beyond Professional Learning Community (PLC) in Education

Schlichter (2015), claimed that during the ensuing decade, the term “professional learning community” gained widespread use throughout the educational community as a common reform structure in schools. The construction of the PLC concept was also informed by research in organizational theory and development and social community theory. A decade after the introduction of the term “professional learning community,” the concept was accepted by practitioners as best practice in school reform. Widespread acceptance by practitioners has led to anecdotal data in support of the concept as a vehicle for reform. However, attempts to establish this framework as a valid reform mechanism require ongoing empirical research to study inputs, effects, and variables impacting the model.

According to Huffman & Hipp, (2003), the goals of PLCs can be linked to the foundation of the progressivism theory of education. Foundational tenets of progressivism are based on the idea that people work together to solve problems; hence, the collaborative nature of successful PLCs. Besides, Social constructivism is one outlet of progressivism that more closely resembles the framework of PLCs. Social constructivism is apparent in PLCs that encourage teachers to collaborate and analyze information and

construct new meaning to solve problems in classrooms, schools, and eventually in society.

According to Hard (2009), the professional learning community concept is supported by the constructivist theory to explain the learning process. It means that professional learning among the teachers and students' learning are not consistent but a dynamic and ongoing process whereby feedbacks, social interaction and active participation play important roles.

Besides, the constructivist perspective explains knowledge as something that is constructed actively by the individual through interaction and communication with the surrounding in his effort to understand life. Further, Kiraly (2014), stated that learning constructively requires an environment whereby the learner works collegially and situated in the activity and in genuine context. Aljohani (2017), declared that there are some principles that serve as guidelines for constructivist learning. Firstly, learning is considered a quest for meaning. Therefore, it starts with an issue that is actively given a meaning. Secondly, the meaning needs an understanding of the overall and its parts. The parts need to be understood in the overall context. Therefore, the process of learning gives concentration on basic concepts and not on separated facts. Thirdly, to teach properly, the individual need to understand the mental mode used by the students to figure out

the world and the assumptions they made to support this model. Lastly, the goal of learning is to confirm that the individual come up with their own meaning, not from memorizing the correct answer or repeating the meaning given by someone else (Ansawi & Pang, 2017).

Features of PLC

Shared values and vision: considered as one of the most important features of PLC. There is “an undeviating focus” on all students’ learning because individual autonomy is seen as potentially reducing teacher efficiency when teachers cannot count on colleagues to reinforce aims. The concept of shared value is depended on shared, collective, and ethical decision making (Bolam et al., 2005). Shared values and vision: work in groups with shared visions and targets, most of activity will be based on sharing.

Collective responsibility: indicates that members of a professional learning community consistently take collective responsibility for student learning. It is assumed that such collective responsibility aids to sustain commitment, puts peer pressure and accountability on those who do not do their fair share, and eases isolation (Watson, 2014).

Reflective professional inquiry which contains: ‘reflective dialogue’

Conversations about serious educational issues or problems involving the application of new knowledge in a sustained manner. In addition, it includes frequent examining of teachers' practice, through mutual observation and case analysis, joint planning and curriculum development; the seeking of new knowledge, implied knowledge that is constantly switched into shared knowledge through interaction and communication; and applying new ideas and information to problem solving that meet students' needs (Hord, 1997).

Collaboration

King (2016), concerns with the involvement of staff in developmental activities with consequences for more than one person, and goes beyond superficial exchanges of help and support, for example, joint review and feedback. The link between collaborative activity and achievement of shared purpose is elaborated. Moreover, Feelings of mutual dependence are central to such collaboration: an aim of better teaching practices would be unachievable without collaboration, linking collaborative activity and achievement of shared purpose.

Importance of PCL

A PLC plays a vital role in building teachers' personal and collective capacities as well as in improving students' achievements in school. In addition, the well-developed PLCs

could positively improve teachers' teaching practices and students' learning activities .it is also observed that a PLC improved teachers' personal, interpersonal and organizational capacities and their commitment to professional development, as well as students' achievements (Lee, Zhang, & Yin, 2011).

Online PLC

During the pandemic crisis of COVID 19, a massive challenge has appeared for teachers\ student–teachers adopting PLCs i.e., the disability of having face–to–face meetings where they can engage in extensive collaboration. One way to address this challenge is through online collaboration using digital tools for problem solving, planning, assessment, and reflection (Dede, 2006; Ross, 2011). Because PLCs depend upon regular interaction with colleagues, often around shared lesson plans or student work, it makes sense to take advantage of online social networking's great potential for facilitating such interaction.

The advantages and challenges of online professional learning communities (PLCs)

Overall, the evidence indicates that online communities of teachers can achieve the goals of PLCs. Blitz, C. L. (2013), declared that teachers who collaborate online are engaged with the group, develop a sense of community, improve their knowledge of subject and pedagogical content, and intend to

modify their instructional practices accordingly. Flexibility is presented as the strongest advantage of online PLCs over the traditional face-to-face environment in facilitating teachers' learning.

Besides, literature shows that the use of an online teacher training program can create opportunities for the expansion of learning opportunities, reflection, feedback, and construction of learning communities. C. L., Foster, J. C., Pritz, S. G., & Kelley, P. (2011), asserted that the use of an online professional learning community (PLC) can provide professional development opportunities including courses, activities, and interactions with peers. Thus, teachers can get together to share resources, solve-problems, develop working strategies, and improve their performance. It is also useful for giving continuous reinforcement of content and teaching abilities where teachers have on-going chances to learn new content and skills, thus providing the time for educators to receive continuous support to help master specific abilities

As well as, Conrad (2005), elaborated that the online environment enables teachers to access and share knowledge in a timely and comprehensive manner. It is also consistently found to be better at promoting self-reflection on learning and instructional practices than is the face-to-face environment, even though both models

appear to contribute equally to learning and mastering subject content.

Another advantage of online PLC that is real world application of theory. By using multimedia including chat rooms, blogs, software programs, videos, and online meetings where educators can interact and begin to identify how particular educational theories can come to life in the classroom.

Moreover, time is one of the most precious commodities for teachers. In face to face PLC teachers may come from different places. So they may face difficulties to regularly meet in the same place. On the other hand, teachers in online PLC can meet easily during evenings and weekends and spend more time on learning concepts than traveling to class or meeting the PLC members. Albion, (2008) asserted that teachers do not have to be in the same physical location in online PLC. Thus, online PLC saves time and breaks the spatiotemporal barriers.

Challenges of online professional learning community (PLC)

Ajayi, L. (2009), illustrated that the online environment is not without challenges, however. Studies indicate that teachers' motivation to engage their peers and contribute regularly to the group was lower online than face-to-face, perhaps because of the greater isolation of teachers who collaborate in a completely online environment.

Prenger, R., Poortman, C. L., & Handelzalts, A. (2017) stated that although online learning has potential benefits, some studies have found that teachers in online professional learning communities have uneven behavior distribution, less interaction, and poor learning continuity. Prenger et al., (2017), clarified that as more and more teachers participate in professional development activities through online learning platforms it is essential to understand the factors related to teachers' learning engagement in online learning environments.

Besides, Durksen et al. (2017), illustrated that since online classes are done completely through the computer, technological issues can occur that make it difficult to complete courses on time. Teachers and students must have modern computers to run online classroom systems and schools often require different online programs and applications. In addition, when there are technological problems, it can be hard to access the classroom or get live help, which can be a major disadvantage when deadlines arrive.

The most common drawbacks of online PLC come from the incorrect implementation. This could be on the part of the teachers or the administrators. For instance, if the administrators dominate the PLC time and do not share leadership roles or exchange experiences, these cause an ineffective PLC. Likely, if teachers

do not embrace the collaborative aspect of a PLC, they will not reap its benefits that will affect students' learning and achievement. In addition, poor infrastructure (especially lack of scheduled time for teachers to meet, or inefficient use of the limited time available).

Although the potential use of the online PLC for teachers' professional development has been emphasized by researchers, there seems to be no common understanding of how teachers can support the professional development of their peers using the online PLC.

Second section: Oral communication

Definition of oral communication

Karimy & Pishkar (2017), clarified that oral communication is one of the most crucial language components that must be practiced communicating orally. People who have ability in speaking will be better in sending and receiving message to one another. Oral communication is the process of building and sharing meanings using verbal and non-verbal symbols in different contexts. It is a productive necessary skill to communicate effectively and efficiently in any language, especially when speakers are not using their native language. Language learners often think the ability to speak a language is the product of language learning; however, this component of language is also an important part of

the language learning process. It is worthwhile for students to know when they learn how to speak; they can use speaking to learn. There are some components of oral communication which should be considered in

Effective English-speaking performance, such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and non-verbal components.

Fluency

According to Mazouzi (2013), the first characteristic of oral communication is fluency. It is the learners' capacity to speak in understandable way in order not to break down communication because listeners may lose their interest, and the ability to answer coherently by connecting the words and phrases, pronouncing the sounds clearly, and using stress and intonation correctly.

Accuracy

Mazouzi (2013), declared that the second component of oral communication is accuracy. Learners should be fluent in learning a foreign language. Therefore, teachers should focus on accuracy in their teaching process. Learners should pay enough attention to the exactness and the completeness of language form when speaking such as focusing on grammatical structures, vocabulary, and pronunciation. To gain accuracy in terms of vocabulary means to choose appropriate words in the suitable contexts. Learners sometimes use similar words or expressions in different

contexts which do not indicate similar things. So, learners should have the ability of using words and expressions.

Pronunciation

Thornbury (2005), indicated that pronunciation is the lowest level of knowledge learners typically pays attention to it. To speak English language accurately, learners should master phonological rules and they should be aware of the various sounds and their pronunciations. Learners should also know the stress, intonation, and pitch to make their pronunciation clear to the listeners. All these elements help learners speak the English language easily and clearly.

Non-verbal components

DeBoer (2007), stated the level of eye contact often depends on the relationship between the communicators and affects both the speaker and the listener. Moreover, (Patel, 2014) elaborated another element of communication which is facial expressions that considered dynamic features which communicate and indicate the speaker's attitude, emotions, and intentions and so on.

The interlink of PLC and oral performance

It is widely believed that the less anxious and more relaxed the learner is, the better her/ his language acquisition proceeds. PLC is based on collaboration and shared visions which related to a concept derived from Vygotsky's social constructivism. According

to Smith and MacGregor (1992), it is an umbrella term for a variety of approaches in education involving joint intellectual effort by students and teachers. It involves “a sense of the social nature of learning and the emphasis on a social approach to the development of learning and life abilities” (Ingleton et al, 2004).

There were some studies used collaboration as an important element of PLC as to enhance the students' language performance, the students' achievement in different fields of studies and teachers' practices. One of these studies revealed the effects of using collaborative learning to enhance students' English-speaking achievement.

Pattanpichet, F. (2011), declared that the findings of that study revealed positive outcomes both in terms of students' improvement on their English oral performance and their opinions toward the use of collaborative learning as an essential principle of PLC in an English-speaking classroom. Based on the findings, it can be seen that the method can be effective in developing the students' competence and creating positive learning atmosphere due to several reasons. First, fruitful collaboration among the students brings a sense of unity and greater familiarity. Frequently working in collaborative English community with their peers, the students became more familiar with the tasks and one another. While their familiarity and friendship were growing, their anxiety

and face threats were simultaneously lowering as the students' feedback revealed that they had no stress, felt relaxed and enjoyed themselves in class. He also elaborated the second reason; collaboration makes students have responsibility for their own learning and at the same time created knowledge-sharing atmosphere.

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That study also elaborated that collaboration as a part of PLC helped develop social skills beneficial for them in the future. The students benefited from continuous self and peer assessment. For each task, the students were asked to assess their performance and their peers". They needed to indicate their own strengths and weaknesses and give each other. Thus, that study illustrated the importance of collaboration to improve students' speaking.

Moreover, there was another study clarified "the effect of using PLC to enhance language learning among students in higher education institution". Its findings also showed that collective and collaborative culture in strategy dimension of PLC implementation connected co-operation between educator, higher management and students that helped better language learning occurred (Smith, 2018). The community in the institution solved the problems together and improved the chances of collaborative learning. This caused the relationship within the community which educator, higher management and students became closer and increased the level of commitment to improve language learning.

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